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PRECIOUS SEED

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He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall
doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.
PSALM, 126. 6.

VOL. 1 No. 1

70TH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

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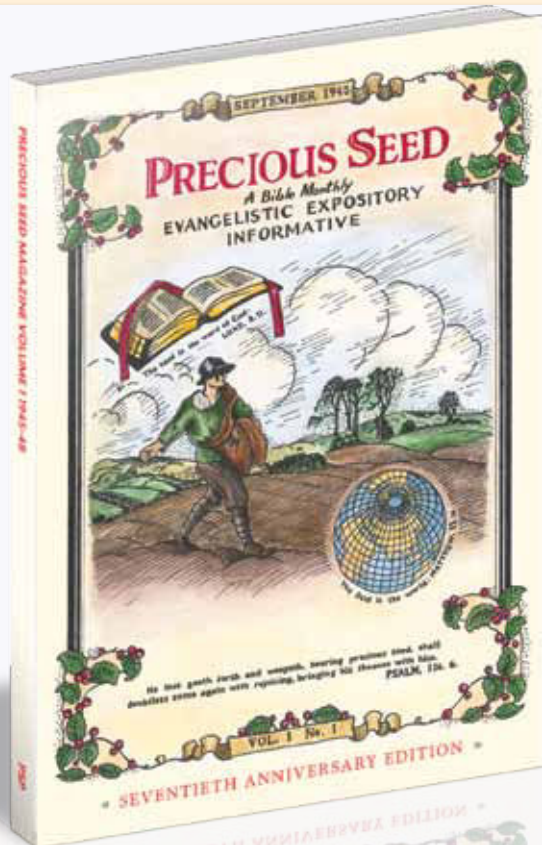
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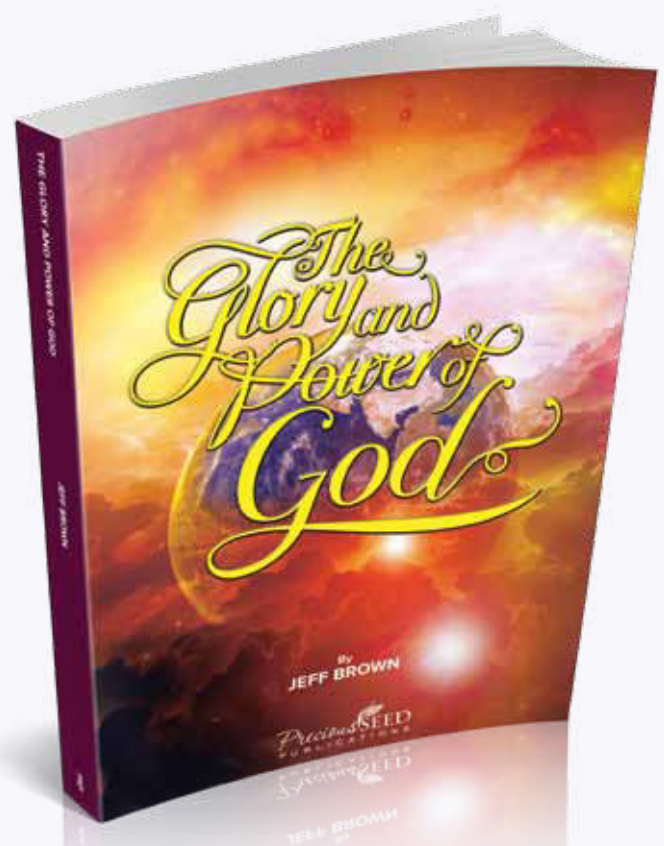
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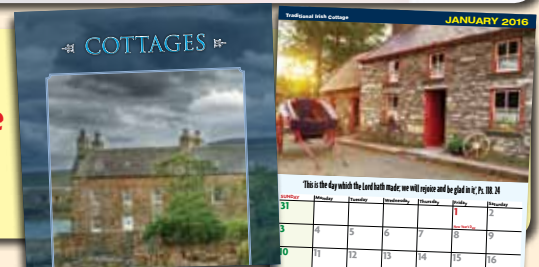
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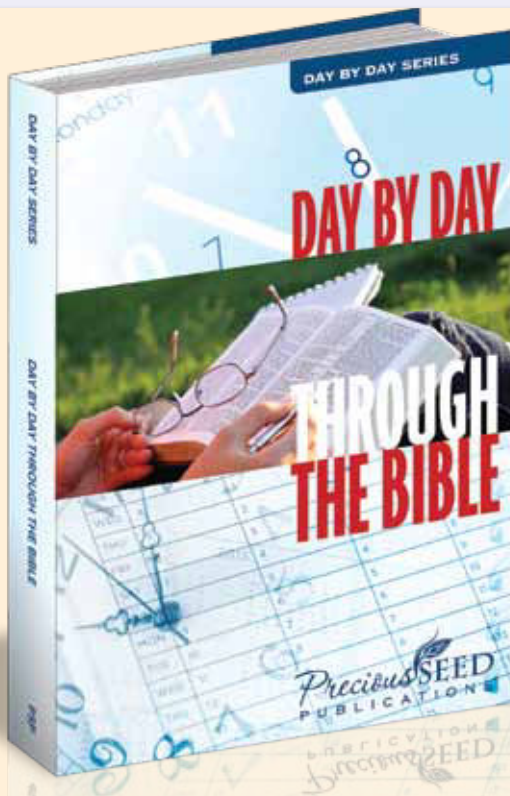


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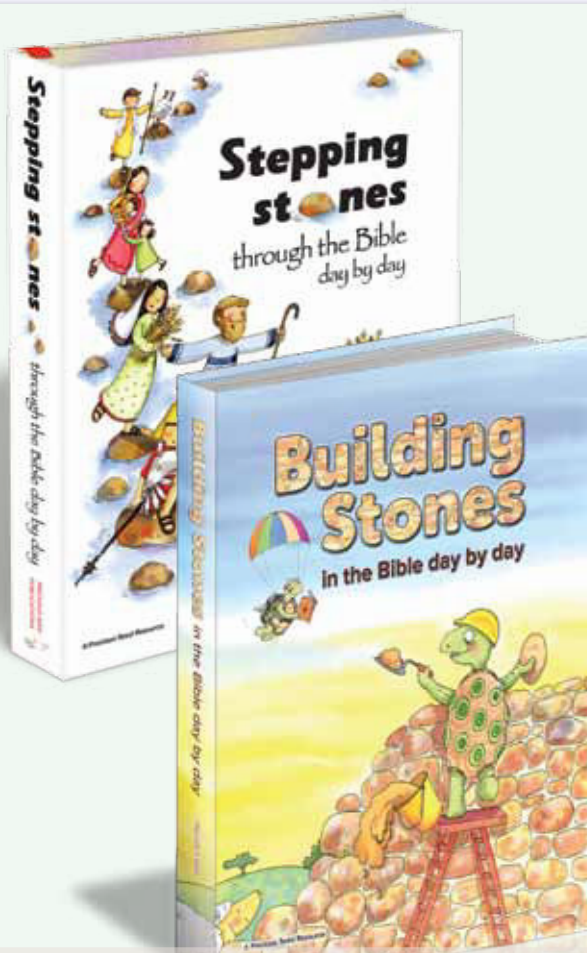
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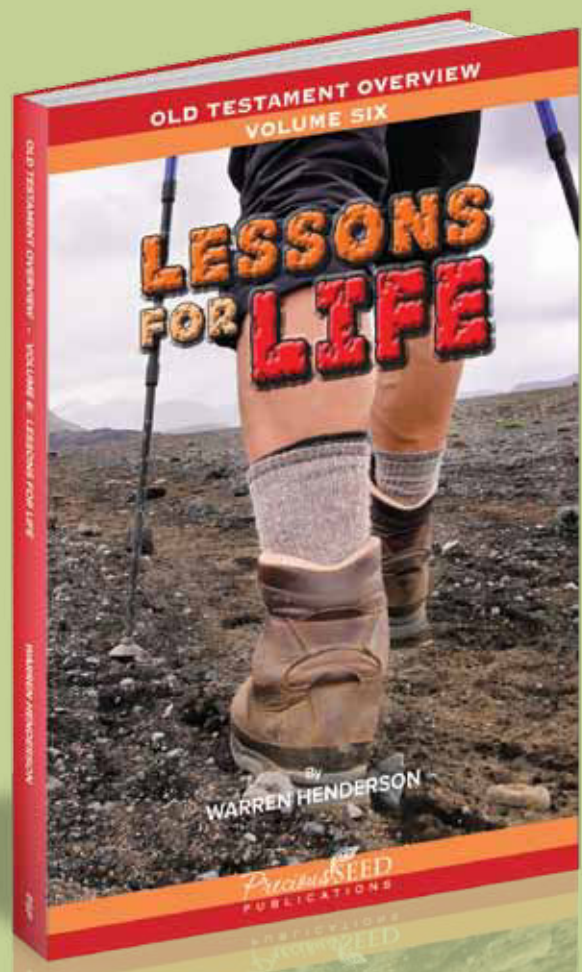


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Editorial

‘For he himself knew what he would do’, John 6. 6.

This statement is made in the account of the feeding of the multitude. It follows a question asked of Philip by the Lord himself. ‘Whence shall we buy bread that these may eat?’ v. 5. We are also given the reason for the question in the next verse, ‘to prove him’. This was a test for Philip as to what his response would be. In our individual circumstances of life, we are tested as to our faith.

In the Epistle of James we are given instruction as to what we should do in times of testing. James tells us, ‘My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations’.¹ It is important to see that he does not say ‘if’ but ‘when’ the test or trial comes. This is not a temptation to sin. It is a test of our faith, not to see if it is genuine but to prove that it is. Tests of our faith come in many different ways; the word ‘divers’, 1. 2, is the same word that is used by Matthew regarding ‘divers diseases’² to describe the many different types. Tests come in many different ways and at different times and we are told to ‘count it all joy’, a circumstance to rejoice in. The reason for the rejoicing is that ‘the trying of your faith worketh patience’, v. 3. The word ‘patience’ has the idea of endurance or staying power.

To go back to Philip again, and the question which the Lord asked of him at the feeding of the multitude, we can see that it was asked to prove his faith and, although his faith was small, it was a lesson which stood him in good stead for the future. The main lesson is that, speaking of the Lord, we are told, ‘for he himself knew what he would do’. In the everyday circumstances of life, when, often, we do not know what to do, let us take heart from this test given to Philip, that we can take the trial or test to the One of whom it is said, ‘For he himself knew what he would do’.

As you will see, November 2015 forms the 70th anniversary edition of the magazine. As well as material from the archive (here: <http://www.preciousseed.org/search.cfm>), each trustee has written a meditation of their own. As we give thanks to God for His continued help in the work, we trust that the articles will prove a blessing to many. In 2016 we hope to introduce some new centre page material, some sketches of assembly work overseas, and changes to our Reports Section.

ENDNOTES

- 1 James 1. 2
- 2 Matt. 4. 24.



CHARACTERS AROUND THE CR

The dreadful example of Judas Iscariot has been burned into the hearts of believers over the years by the phrase at the beginning of the frequently-read passage on the Lord's Supper, 'the same night in which he was betrayed', 1 Cor. 11. 23. It is as though the Spirit of God wants to impress on our hearts, in this most Christ-centred feast, the horror of what one of His band of disciples had done to our Lord. It is not just to remind us of what Judas did, but also to warn us lest we should do the same. How was it that one of His 'disciples' could betray Him?

His Privilege

Judas was *intimate with the Teacher*. There were many who had been waiting and longing for the arrival of '[him] that should come' and had been 'looking for redemption'. Suddenly, here was one, Jesus of Nazareth, who claimed to be the Christ. Out of a larger group of disciples, we read that our Lord chose twelve 'to be with Him'. Plucked from obscurity, Judas joined a small band of men who were given privileges such as we have never had, and others in our Lord's day longed to have. After all, did not Legion plead to be with Him, as doubtless did many others?¹ To Judas was given the huge privilege of spending time with the Word of God incarnate, the One who had come to reveal the Father. For just over three years, he had access to the Son of God Himself, not only in front of the crowds, but also in intimate moments, in a home at the close of the day, during the night hours, in the early morning. Judas sat with Him, ate with Him, talked to Him, listened to Him, touched Him, slept near Him, and watched Him. He saw our Lord when He was hungry, when He was thirsty, when He was wearied with His journey, when the 'contradiction of sinners against himself' was at its most hurtful. Judas had been given an opportunity second to

1 JUDAS – WHO BET

none. He was also *instructed in the truth*. As a disciple, Judas followed the Lord for over three years, hearing all that He taught the public. Many only heard some of what our Lord had to say about God, as He revealed the Father to men, but Judas would have heard it all. He also heard Him teach truth that was hidden from the masses. He was there, after the crowds had gone, when the Lord explained to the disciples things that were hidden from others. He was there to hear Him say, 'Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand', Luke 8. 10. Here was a man who was instructed in the truth of God, by the Truth of God, like few others. He was also *involved with the testimony*. Our Lord's disciples were identified as His. When the twelve were sent out to preach and to heal, Judas went with them. Judas was among those who came back, thrilled and excited that they had cast out demons in the name of Jesus. To all intents and purposes, Judas was one of the band. Yet it is instructive to note that he never once called our Lord, 'Lord', as did the others. He addressed Him as 'Rabbi', Teacher, but never in any other way. He never seemed to have believed, or been touched by the Lord's teaching and example.

His Problem

Why is it that Judas went on from such a privileged position to betray the Lord? What he heard was not mixed with faith. Our Lord said to His disciples, 'The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life. But there are some of you that believe not. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who

By
IAN REES
Carmarthen,
Wales

should betray him', John 6. 63-64. Our Lord went on to say of Judas, 'Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?' v. 70, and in the Upper Room He referred to

Judas when He said, 'Ye are clean, but not all', 13. 10. No matter how great the opportunity to hear the word of the Lord, where there is no faith, no conversion will be seen. Judas' position in eternity is all the more terrible if we remember how close He was to the Truth and how much he saw of His divine power, yet he believed not. It was our Lord Himself who said, of Bethsaida, Chorazin, and Capernaum, 'if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee', Matt. 11. 23-24. Exposure to the truth, and rejection of it, brings heavier judgement.

His Passion

There was something else that seemed to drive the heart of Judas Iscariot, and that was his love of money. Many in the world today misquote scripture when they say that money is the root of all evil. It is not. It is the love of money which is the root.² And Judas seemed to love money more than he loved his avowed Master. When a woman anointed the feet of the Lord, Judas did not see the appropriateness of the worship, nor was his heart moved by her appreciation of what the Lord had done for her. He saw only the monetary value of the broken vase and the outpoured ointment: 'Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag and bare what was



UCIFIXION

RAYED HIM

put therein', John 12. 5-6. How could anyone, let alone one of His disciples, steal from the Son of God? Perhaps it was because Judas did not see Him as the Son of God. He saw an opportunity for betterment, a chance to be involved in an uprising against the Romans with a politically-motivated Messiah. But he was to be pierced through with sorrows, as the love of money would lead him on to betray the Son of God for a paltry sum.

His Perfidy

And so it was that, into this unbelieving and covetous heart, Satan found little difficulty planting the seed of sedition. Having heard of the monetary reward the chief priests were offering for Jesus of Nazareth, Judas was moved to betray Him. Then, such was the alacrity with which Judas embraced the thought and set out to the deed, Satan found no difficulty in entering into Judas' heart, 13. 2, 27. Despite the grace our Lord showed Judas in the Upper Room, and despite the warnings our Lord gave him, Judas went out into the literal darkness of the night, and the spiritual darkness of his betrayal, to wend his way to the door of the high priest's palace. From there he would lead a band of men armed with lanterns, torches and weapons, ironically as though they were seeking a thief. Once in the garden, he would not only identify his 'Master', but he would do so in such an inappropriate way as to draw forth the exclamation from our Lord, 'Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?' Luke 22. 48. Our Lord had been betrayed by 'his own familiar friend', one who had supped with Him. That night, in a garden, a man stooped to the lowest depths mankind has ever gone. Yet in that same garden, a man, even the Son of

God, showed the highest love a man has ever showed when He went out to meet His betrayer, in obedience to His Father and love for His own.

His Perdition

It is our Lord Himself who calls Judas 'the son of perdition', John 17. 12. Whether this means he has gone to perdition, or was characterized by perdition is not clear.³ Peter says of Judas, 'He was numbered with us and had obtained part of this ministry', but then goes on to say, from which he 'by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place', Acts 1. 17, 25. Before he committed suicide, Judas showed some remorse in that he recognized he had betrayed innocent blood, but he did not show true repentance. Unlike Peter, who wept bitterly when he denied his Lord and was forgiven and restored, there is no indication that Judas ever did so.

What a tragedy, that one so very close to the Lord should yet have been so very far! But he surely is an example and warning to us all. How many of us have had the immense privilege of being instructed in the truth, intimate, in the proper sense of the word, with the teachers of the truth, and involved in the testimony of the Lord and His people? We have had opportunities second to none, ourselves, while many in our generation never hear the

name of Christ used in any way other than with disrespect. Yet is what we hear mixed with faith, or is it choked by the love of money – the love of anything – more than a love for God and His Son? Surely, whenever we hear those words, 'the night in which he was betrayed' our hearts should remember the perfidy of Judas, and many others like him since, and we should steel our hearts to ensure that we, ourselves, do not rise from the table at the breaking of bread, having avowed a love and devotion to our Lord, and then go out and betray Him or His own during the week.

Endnotes

- 1 Mark 5. 18
- 2 1 Tim. 6. 10
- 3 The word 'perdition' in the scriptures usually refers to the final state of spiritual ruin and punishment from which believers are 'saved'. The expression 'son of perdition' is also used of the Antichrist, 2 Thess. 2. 3, who is 'the man of sin'. It probably means both Judas and the Antichrist are irrevocably given over to perdition.

IAN REES is a publications editor of *Precious Seed*.



It is James who, in his Epistle, underlines the fact that genuine faith will always be accompanied by appropriate works. A Joseph stands at both the entrance and the exodus of the earthly pathway of the Lord Jesus. No spoken word is recorded of either, yet, by their actions, they gave evidence that their appreciation of the Lord Jesus was as deep and as true as that of any individual in the four gospels.

THEN CAME A RI

By **JOHN SCARBROOK** Killamarsh, England

The record of Joseph of Arimathea, though brief, introduces us to a man of remarkable courage and selfless devotion. All we know of him is found at the end of each gospel after the darkness had receded and the crowds had dispersed, leaving three tortured and lifeless bodies on Golgotha's bloodstained scaffold. Tradition has sought to embellish the life of Joseph, but the inspired word holds sufficient to occupy our attention and to touch our hearts as we consider the awesome task undertaken by the most unlikely of men that day.

As Matthew writes his gospel, the Spirit of God engages his mind with Old Testament scripture, familiar to the nation to whom Matthew primarily directs his record. Throughout his twenty-eight chapters there are no fewer than 130 direct quotations, references and allusions to the Old Testament. To the Jewish mind, if unencumbered by bigotry and dogmatism, clear evidence is given that Jesus of Nazareth must be the promised Messiah.

It is, therefore, no surprise that Matthew's introduction to Joseph, even before his name is mentioned, reminds the reader that though men appointed His grave with the wicked, it was essential that a rich man should be in attendance at His burial. Scripture cannot fail! We learn that Joseph was a disciple of the Lord, but that was insufficient in itself to fulfil the prophecy of Isaiah chapter 53 verse 9. He must also be rich – and he was! In fact, the only individual so designated in the gospel by Matthew.

All the gospel writers note that he came from Arimathea. Many students

of scripture equate this with the Ramah of the Old Testament. If that is so, then we recall that this was the home town of Samuel. Writing on the life of the prophet, W. W. FEREDAY called him 'God's emergency man', a fitting description for this New Testament son of Ramah.

The name Joseph means 'He shall add', recalling the experience of Rachel, the wife of Jacob, as a son was born after those barren, fruitless years. Wherever, in scripture, there is a Joseph, there is hope. Rachel's son will later say to his brethren, 'God did send me before you to preserve life', Gen. 45. 5. The angelic word to Joseph, the husband of Mary, was of One who would 'save His people from their sins', Matt. 1. 21. To the natural man, Calvary speaks of failure, defeat and loss. But a Joseph stands by the cross and Ben-oni, 'son of sorrow', becomes Benjamin, 'son of my right hand', and the hope of victory is assured.

Matthew's account will teach us, above all, what it cost this rich man to undertake his task that day. It would cost him his standing in society. His care for the body of the despised Nazarene would close the door of the Jewish Sanhedrin against him. His reputation would be ruined in the eyes of his peers in Jerusalem. The cost of providing a burying place, and that 'his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock'; Matthew alone will emphasize the personal pronouns. It cost Joseph everything he held dear to minister of his substance to another in need.

When Mark takes up his pen to write of Joseph, in keeping with the tenor of his gospel, he is interested not so much in the cost but rather the cause. Not what he did, but why he did it! As ever in the servant gospel, he examines the motive behind the actions. Mark will take a moment to consider how Joseph conducted his daily routine business and record that he was 'an honourable counsellor', Mark 15. 43.

We are then given two reasons why Joseph undertook this onerous task. First, 'because it was the preparation . . . the day before the Sabbath'. As a devout Jew, he had respect for God's word, and Deuteronomy chapter 21 decreed that the body of a man hanged upon a tree should 'not remain all night upon the tree', but should be buried that day. The second reason was that 'he also waited for the kingdom of God'. Like Simeon, at the Lord's coming in, he waited with confidence, patience and expectation and had become convinced that this Jesus of Nazareth was the anticipated One. The remarkable faith of these two men illuminates the page of scripture. Simeon saw the fulfilment of his hopes in a tiny babe; Joseph saw it in the lifeless body of a crucified man! The two motives which directed His actions that day were obedience to the word of God and devotion to the Christ of God. What a lesson in service for all believers!

Mark tells us that Joseph went in boldly to Pilate, 'and craved the body of Jesus'. Pilate is among others in the gospel who, on occasion, marvelled at the Lord Jesus, His works, His words and His ways. Pilate expressed surprise that He was already dead. What he did not appreciate was that the perfect servant knew precisely that there was 'a time to die'. Not at the dictates of Rome nor of Herod, not at the whim of the Jewish rulers, but according to the divine plan conceived in the eternal counsels, 'before the foundation of the world'. Mark's poignant record says, 'he . . . took him down . . . wrapped him . . . laid him'. The precious ashes of the sacrifice, were resting in a clean place, Lev. 6. 11.

Luke paints his portrait of Joseph from a slightly different angle. He is not concerned about the cost or the cause, but will tell us something of the character of Joseph. Consistently in his gospel, Luke observes a number of individuals, often introducing them with the phrase, 'a certain man named'. All, of course, are seen in



THE GOOD MAN OF ARIMATHEA

contrast to Luke's primary objective, which is to carefully examine the perfect Man and to give his verdict. This he does first from the judge presiding over the highest court in the land, 'I find no fault in this man', then from the parched lips of a tormented, dying felon, 'this man hath done nothing amiss'.

The Spirit of God never dispenses accolades in an arbitrary or casual way; they need to be earned. So, when Luke is inspired to record of Joseph that, 'he was a good man and a just', he stands alongside very worthy personalities in the New Testament. Barnabas, that 'son of consolation' in Acts chapter 4 is the only other individual to be described as 'a good man', and only three others in the gospel records, Joseph, the husband of Mary, Simeon and John the Baptist are deemed to be 'just', well respected company indeed!

Luke will tell us also that Joseph was consistent and honest. He was no 'yes man', no hypocrite. When the scheming, surreptitious plans were laid to ensnare the Saviour, Joseph was there, but he 'had not consented to the counsel and deed of them', Luke 23. 51. Now, however, decisions had to be made and Joseph 'went unto Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus'. The word 'begged' does not imply a cringing servile attitude, but rather a petitioner asking for something from one who has the authority to grant the request. Mark tells us that Joseph went in boldly, confidently, to Pilate. Luke will maintain his theme of the absolute purity and impeccability of the Lord Jesus, later endorsed by John, as he records that the borrowed tomb was one 'wherein never man before was laid'.

John's record is different. As he considers Joseph there is no mention of riches, honourable, good or just. He is simply a disciple and even that, 'secretly for fear of the Jews'. That gives us the key to John's testimony to Joseph. If, as we have seen, Matthew considers the cost, Mark the cause and Luke the character of Joseph, John will reveal the conflict

that gripped this man's whole being as the shadow on the sundial moved relentlessly on to the commencement of the Sabbath. The legs of the two thieves had been shattered with an iron mallet, hastening death by shock and asphyxiation. The lifeless body on the centre cross having received, *post mortem*, one final indignity from a Roman spear, now awaited removal from Golgotha to fulfil the request of the Jewish authorities that 'they might be taken away', John 19. 31.

Events that day appeared to have been orchestrated by the Jews, by Pontius Pilate and a detachment of Roman soldiers. In reality, they were each in their own way moving under the inexorable power of the living word of God, spoken and recorded many centuries before! So many scriptures were fulfilled that day at Calvary, and as Joseph came from the presence of Pilate with authority to remove the body from the centre cross, Isaiah's words, spoken some 700 years earlier, now took substance.

The moment was almost past, he must make his stand, doubtless Joseph counted the cost, then, the decision was made, he would follow the Master's steps to Calvary. Maybe he thought it would be a lonely journey, and, if we only had the synoptic gospels, that would seem to be the case. But John now brings another figure into focus: moving slowly, burdened with 'about an hundred pound weight of spices', fragrant and costly. John had kept his eye upon Nicodemus right from chapter 3 of his gospel; there he tells us of a man confused. In chapter 7, John sees him concerned. But now at Golgotha he is a man converted. The Lord had reminded Nicodemus of the wilderness experience of the nation and the

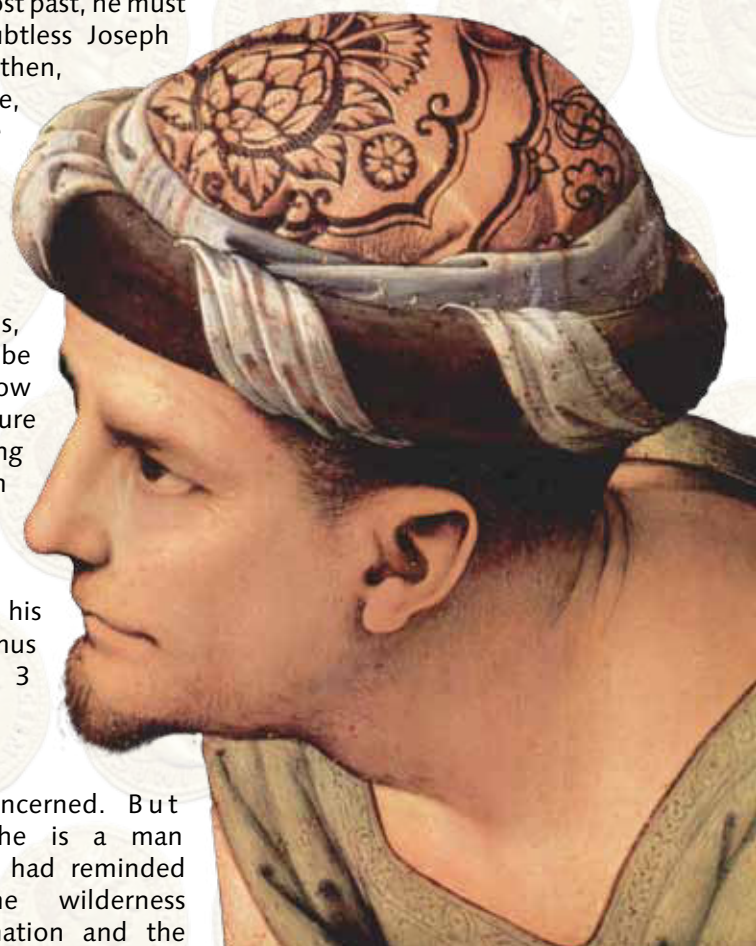
uplifted serpent of brass, adding by way of explanation, 'even so must the Son of man be lifted up', 3. 14. He could have said, 'and you will take Him down', but He refrained; the Spirit of God must do His work.

And so they come. Two men from the very ranks of those who pursued the Saviour to Calvary, now united in fellowship, ready to take the first steps in following the despised Nazarene.

Gently they took Him down
Unfixed His hands and feet,
Took from His head the thorny crown,
Brought forth the winding sheet.

[ISAAC EWAN]

JOHN SCARSBROOK is secretary to the Precious Seed Trust.





Hannah lived in a very difficult time in Israel's history. The nation had just come through a period when accountability was ridiculed and 'every man did that which was right in his own eyes', Judg. 21. 25, and when, through a series of judges, there were attempts to keep the people on a level spiritual track, but with mixed success.

The spiritual health of the nation was at a low ebb, and they were about to embark on one of the most difficult times in their history. In this atmosphere Hannah shows herself to be a woman of extreme spiritual sensitivity, and is used by God to bring about remarkable change. She would see the removal of a corrupt priesthood, and the nation governed by a man after God's own heart, with the eventual introduction of David as King.

Her circumstances

Hannah lived in difficult circumstances both domestically and spiritually, surrounded by some very unspiritual people, and yet she lived a life of commitment with high spiritual values and dedication to the Lord. Her story demonstrates what God can do with a life wholly yielded to Him, to His service, and the fulfilment of His purpose.

At home

She lived in a home marked by divided affections and in which jealousy was the main driving force. Her husband did not seem to be on the same spiritual plane as she was. In 1 Samuel chapter 2, when Hannah was dealing with big spiritual issues and wished to remain at the temple, it is recorded that her husband went home. He was a man with divided affections, having two wives – Hannah and Penninah. He was a man marked by partiality – when distributing his portions and his favours he gave Hannah a double portion, thus stoking the fire of jealousy which lay in Penninah's heart. He did not understand the issues Hannah was struggling with – the impact her lack of children was having on her at home – 'Am I not better for you than many children?', he declared.

HANNAH

FAITHFUL AMIDST UNFAITHFUL

By **IAN GRANT** Aberdeen, Scotland

Her husband's other wife made life extremely difficult for Hannah. She had borne children and Hannah had none, and Penninah took every opportunity to taunt her with that fact. She poured out her spite continually and, in particular, at the time when the family were due to engage in spiritual exercise, 'when they went to the house of the Lord'.

So, very much alone, in a home where there were some who tried to divert her from spiritual exercise and activity, Hannah maintained her deep desire to be what God wanted her to be.

In the Temple

In addition, the priesthood – the spiritual leadership of the nation – was in a parlous state. Eli the high priest was an old man and, while that in itself is no bar to spiritual leadership, his attitudes and actions were unworthy of the office. He was motivated by self-interest, 1 Sam. 2. 29 – 'he made . . . [himself] fat from the offerings'. He lacked:

- Spiritual *insight* in that he misinterpreted Hannah's actions, 1. 13.
- Spiritual *character* in that he refused to deal with the ungodliness and immorality in his family, 2. 29.
- Spiritual *judgement* leaving the priesthood in the hands of his sons who were patently unfit for the job, 2. 17.

He and his sons were also broadly responsible for the loss of the ark to the Philistines, 4. 11. Much could be said about the character of these men who took the lead, but they serve as warnings and examples of what leaders should *not* be, and to emphasize that spiritual leadership of God's people requires the highest moral and spiritual character.

Despite the clear failure in her spiritual leaders, Hannah never let it affect her relationship with the Lord, and, in fact, it drove her closer to Him and to seek His presence the more.

Her commitment

Hence, from the negative aspects of her surroundings and the failure in the people around her, let us turn to the kind of person she was, how she acted, and the outcomes of her spiritual exercise.

Her knowledge of God

We should notice that she is a woman of deep spiritual insight and has a grasp of Divine purpose. Note the kind of things she says in her song, 1 Sam. 2. She understands and appreciates the glory of God's grace and the righteousness of His judgements and His purposes for one who was yet to be born. Her understanding of how God works and of His purposes is clear and, in her song, she provides visions of events that go way beyond her own timescale and horizons.

Her experience of God's sovereignty

She is in the Lord's hands for the development of His purposes. The Lord had shut up her womb and, as a result, she turns to Him in her distress. The sacrificial surrender to Him of her body and its fruit enables the Lord to bring in a man of deep spiritual commitment. He will save the nation from its enemies, oversee the removal of a failed royal family, and the establishment of the man after God's own heart, whose seed will hold the throne of Israel eternally. In the process, the corrupt spiritual leaders of the nation were removed and the king who was anointed would fulfil both kingly and priestly functions. Not only was she in the Lord's hands for His purpose



AH ITHFULNESS

but she deliberately put herself there and in a very real sense fulfils the requirements of Romans chapter 12 verse 1.

Likewise, Mary, who may have derived some of her understanding from women like Hannah, simply put herself in the Lord's hands to be whatever He wished her to be, and to be the vehicle for the fulfilment of His purpose. The incident serves to remind us of what God can do with a life dedicated and surrendered to Him. In addition, the way in which Hannah dealt with her son is a challenge to the mothers of today to consider what their families might achieve for God, if committed to Him in the same way. Who knows what potential for the blessing of God's people lies in young lives brought up in the 'fear and admonition of the Lord'?

Her humility of spirit

She refused to retaliate to the jibes and barbs directed at her. She responded with great humility, and dealt with the issues before the Lord, and refused to let the way in which she was being treated deflect her from her exercises before the Lord – she fulfilled her vows. How like the Lord, who 'when He was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered He threatened not', 1 Peter 2. 23.

Raising a man for God

It is clear that she knew what her son needed to become a man of God and to fulfil his service – the

maintenance of his Nazarite vow, not temporarily, but for the duration of his life and service. Thus, the delivery of appropriate annual material provisions to enable him to continue his spiritual exercises. She presents the mothers and, of course, fathers of today with a challenge: how are we nurturing and caring for our young men and women? Are we ensuring appropriate provision for their spiritual development? The world will bombard them constantly with material and philosophies aimed at diverting them from a committed Christian life. Like Hannah, our task should be one of protection, and

her place in the development of His purpose. We often ask those who don't know Christ what it is that keeps them from trusting. Perhaps we need to ask ourselves what is there in our lives which hinders and blocks our usefulness for Him.

The consequences

For Hannah there are two main outcomes of her actions. It would seem that the way in which she handled her difficult domestic circumstances broke down the barriers and created a harmony in her marriage, as year by year, following the dedication of Samuel, she and her husband continued to go to the House of the Lord to offer their annual sacrifice, 1 Sam. 2. 19. Also, her sacrificial giving up of her son ushered in for Hannah herself a period of fruitfulness in her own life – she was given a further three sons and two daughters. How true it is that no sacrifice for Him will go unnoticed or unrewarded! But there were greater and more wide-ranging consequences which would touch the people of God as a whole. As a result of her exercise and actions Samuel was born, the man who would see David introduced, the ancestor of Christ. Under Samuel's guidance and influence, the word of the Lord would be given free course and its rightful place: 'the Lord let . . . none of his words fall to the ground', 3. 19. Moreover, the people were given a period of rest from their enemies

and a restoration of territory which they lost.

All this because a young woman, in an act of personal sacrifice, gave back to God what He had given to her, to be used in His service and for the blessing of His people. What about us?



the introduction of positive spiritual ideals and principles – places they go, what they see, what they hear and listen to. All should be targeted at the development of their spiritual lives.

All on the altar

We notice that Hannah sacrificed her dearest and most valued possession for the work of God. It seems no price was too great for her to fulfil her vows to the Lord, and to ensure

IAN GRANT is a member of the *Precious Seed Trust*.



The Epistle (letter) to Titus, though short, is full of practical teaching about local church life and the personal behaviour of believers. In essence, it is a manual containing truth and training for new believers. It is well worth getting to grips with!

New Testament letters are of immense importance as they are the solid basis on which historians build a picture of how the world was in the past. J. B. PHILLIPS in his little book *Ring of Truth* says, 'we have the strongest possible evidence for the early days of Christianity from the letters of Paul, James, Peter and John. It is letters which are of unique value to the historian who is trying to record the actual events of any period. Newspapers, and before them broadsheets and pamphlets, naturally have their worth, but they are likely to be slanted one way or another. But if the historian can lay his hands upon a packet of letters, he has priceless evidence for the period of which he is writing'.¹ That view is from a human standpoint. We, however, have the confidence that a letter like that to Titus is inspired by God and accurate in what it teaches.

In the New Testament, all Christians are expected to be in fellowship in a local church. If you take this as the starting point then the teaching is direct and applicable to us all. A local church is made up of different groups of people. Some of these groups are the same as in general society, e.g., older women, older men, young men, and young women. However, there are some additional categories described in the New Testament which are specific to the life and activity of a local church. The only such group described in this letter are the elders. This classic piece of written teaching also provides a treasure of truth about salvation.



By **STEPHEN G. BAKER** Liverpool, England

Truth and Training – Chapter 1

Introduction – How you got saved
and why God saved you, vv.
1-4

Identifying and appointing elders,
vv. 5-9

Sorting out the opposition –
Convicting false teachers, vv.
10-16

Paul, a servant of God, v. 1a

Paul starts this letter by identifying who is writing. Just as we do today, people in the ancient world wrote letters that included certain standard elements. They had their own conventional introductions and conclusions. The opening usually identified who was writing, who the letter was sent to, and then some form of greeting. As in most of his letters, Paul starts writing to Titus using this ancient formula, 'Paul, a servant of God' and ends the letter in chapter 3 with a final expression of his desire or prayers for Titus and all the people he works with – 'Grace be with you all. Amen', 3. 15.

However, it is important to think about how the apostle introduces himself in each letter; there is significance in every expression of scripture. Any limitation to our understanding lies with the reader and not the author. The Spirit of God is the ultimate author of scripture, 2 Tim. 3. 16. In this Epistle Paul calls himself 'a servant'. This really means 'a slave'. To get the full force of this description we need to understand that Paul was a well-educated, free-born Roman citizen, but he is calling

himself a slave. This would be a most humiliating statement for a person in that position to make. Someone else owned a slave and that person determined their activities in life! Paul had become a Christian and had willingly surrendered his liberties to the Lord Jesus Christ. He now followed the directions of his Master; he lived by the principles and values that his Master lived by and he was willing to be constantly in the service of the Saviour.

This statement 'a slave of God' would send a very strong message to Titus and the people that Titus was working among. Titus had stayed behind in Crete at the request of Paul, as there were many things that needed his attention, v. 5. The Cretans were a wild type of people. Later in this chapter we will read about their national characteristics, v. 12. People of the temperament of the Cretans would definitely have been amazed to meet a man who had been so changed by the grace of God that he was submissive, obedient and humble before the One who had saved him.

'And an apostle of Jesus Christ', v. 1b

The second way that Paul describes himself is as 'an apostle of Jesus Christ'. The word apostle was an official title for someone who was commissioned by and for the Lord Jesus Christ. The word has the idea of a delegate, a messenger, or an ambassador behind it. In general terms, some people in the New Testament are called apostles, 1 Cor. 15. 7; 2 Cor. 8. 23, but that would be the exception and





from Titus

used only to describe someone sent on a specific mission. The technical and main use of the word is that of a group of men called and appointed by the Lord Jesus to be witnesses of His life, death, and, in particular, His resurrection.² The apostle Paul was a unique addition to this group of men. He talks about himself as the 'least of the apostles', 1 Cor. 15. 9, because he persecuted the church of God. He had not been with the established group of apostles, but had seen the Lord in resurrection on the road to Damascus.³ He was, however, an apostle and had been personally commissioned by the Lord Jesus to be a witness for him.⁴ The late Jack Hunter of Kilmarnock used to teach that when the title 'Jesus Christ' or 'Christ Jesus' is used the emphasis is always on the first part of the name. So the order in the name 'Jesus Christ' reminds us that this is the one who was once on earth but that He is now in heaven. The reverse order teaches us that He is now in heaven but once He lived on earth. What a blessing there is in both truths – the grace of His coming down and the grandeur of the one now residing in the majesty of heaven.

'According to the faith of God's elect', v. 1c

The service that God had called Paul to had a double aim and objective:

1. To bring to faith those that God had chosen for salvation.
2. To bring them to learn and acknowledge the truth, which results in godliness.

There has been a lot of discussion and disagreement about the subject of God's electing grace. However, there are clear passages in scripture that

teach this truth. While none of us claim to understand how God works all things 'according to the good pleasure of his will', Eph. 1. 5, and 'after the counsel of his own will', v. 11, we must accept what scripture teaches. When considering a topic such as this, it is wise to remember that we do not understand scripture by human logic, 1 Cor. 2. 14.

Let us look at a couple of passages of scripture to help us understand, in general terms, the truth of God's sovereign right to choose.

'Ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain', Acts 2. 23 – this is in relation to the death of Christ. In that chapter Peter makes the men of Israel responsible for the Lord's death, but in the same breath he states that the death of Christ was in the divine plan – 'Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God'. We cannot work out how men could be responsible for the death of Christ and that, at the same time, God was working out His purposes, but we certainly would not teach that the death of Christ was solely the result of the actions of wicked men.

Another passage that helps in this respect is Matthew chapter 26 verse 24. The scene is what we call 'the last supper'. The Lord is telling the disciples that one of them will betray Him. We know now that it was Judas who the Lord was referring to, but listen to his word, 'The Son of man goeth as it is written of him' – that's the sovereign, electing choice of God. Now think about the next phrase – 'but woe unto that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed!

It had been good for that man if he had not been born'. So the Lord is holding Judas responsible for his actions, and at the same time telling us that his act of betrayal had been predicted in the scriptures. Difficult to grasp from a human perspective! If we believe the scriptures to be the word of God, we must accept what it teaches. When it comes to the salvation of an individual, both principles are taught in scripture; God elected for salvation, and we exercised our will and responded to the call of the gospel.⁵

This is reason number one for Paul's slavery and apostleship – to bring God's elect to faith.

'The acknowledgement of the truth which is after godliness', v. 1d

The second reason for Paul's slavery and apostleship was to teach the truth to those who were saved. A believer cannot know God intimately without learning the truth of God's word. We need to know God, His character and His presence. As we drink deeply of these wonderful truths, we will deepen our experience of God. The outcome of this will be a life lived in a way that is pleasing to God. Godliness starts with knowledge, it is lived out in all the experiences of life, and it drives us back to God and His word. Thus our knowledge of God is an ongoing process that will never be complete until we stand in His presence.

Endnotes

- 1 J. B. PHILLIPS, *Ring of Truth, A Translators Testimony*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1967.
- 2 Acts 1. 16-26, in particular verses 21, 22.
- 3 Acts 9; 1 Cor. 15. 8.
- 4 See Acts 9. 15; 22. 14, 15; 26. 16.
- 5 For support for this view see: Acts 13. 48; 18. 10; 2 Thess. 2. 13.

STEPHEN BAKER is the editor of *Young Precious Seed and Faith Matters*





Many believers in the Lord Jesus experience times of difficulty. Sometimes, there may be circumstances which are visible to others; in many cases, there are matters known only to the individual. It may be through sickness or in relation to employment; some may be struggling with a particular sin. In other cases, it is a burden for a loved one – a close family member or friend who is in a backslidden condition, or, even worse, now denies faith in Christ. In each case, the problem is personal, very real, and has the potential to seemingly overwhelm the believer. In such cases where should we turn?

'LET US'

By **STEPHEN SHERWIN** Derby, England

affect them personally. On thirteen occasions in twelve verses the phrase 'Let us' occurs in our English version. In each case the writer is seeking to bring home the lessons he has been making. Notice how he includes himself, 'us' – he is not above his readers, and neither are we. None of us can ever say that we have gained sufficient spiritual maturity that these exhortations are no longer applicable to us.

In this Epistle the Christian life is presented as a life that demands time and effort. He will speak of labour, holding fast, moving forwards constantly, ridding oneself of that which will hold us back, running with endurance. It reminds us of the words of the Lord Jesus, 'If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me', Matt. 16. 24. How much time and effort are we prepared to expend?

Exhortation can be given by way of a challenge. Sometimes, it can be by encouragement. Trace each occurrence of this expression 'Let us' and it will be seen how they can affect every area of our life. This includes: making sure that we have really got salvation in the first place; pointing us to Christ as a means of encouraging us when the way is rough; and making sure that our affections are truly centred in Christ. In addition, we are encouraged to have a care for each other.

It is beyond the scope of this article to consider each occurrence in detail but we will consider a selection, with the hope that this will stimulate personal study.

The first occurrence of the phrase is in chapter 4 verse 1, 'Let us therefore fear'. What has the writer in mind that his readers should fear and why? In chapter 3, he has been considering the example of those Israelites who left Egypt following the Passover, where they had sheltered beneath the blood. They had been 'baptized to Moses in the cloud' – and yet we discover that they never entered

into the Promised Land. Why? It was because of their unbelief, 3. 19! If we measure success by modern standards, then the exodus from Egypt was a tremendous success! A huge multitude knew salvation from Egypt. It was never God's intention, however, that the people should be taken out of Egypt to die in the wilderness. When the people tested God and refused to believe Him, He swore that they would not enter into His rest, 3. 11. In reality, success was to be measured by the number that actually got into the land.

It would have been disturbing and discouraging for these dear Hebrew believers to see others going back having initially professed faith in Christ. Sad though it was, the writer puts it very plainly that although the gospel had been preached, for some it had not been 'mixed with faith', 4. 2. These people had not entered into God's rest – they were going back to a religion of works, to ceaseless activity and could never earn or deserve rest. How sad to see men and women taken up with works when it is actually those who *believe*, not *work*, that enter into rest. There is a sense that this rest is enjoyed now by the believer, for we receive rest from Christ, Matthew chapter 11, but there is also a sense that this rest will have a future fulfilment, Heb. 4. 9.

Perhaps some of his readers were wavering. They had not thought through the implications of going back. Would there be some who would read and would be challenged by this solemn warning as to whether they really had faith in Christ? We must always bear in mind that once a person has trusted Christ then they are saved forever – the Lord Jesus Himself guarantees this, John 10. 28-29. The writer is not thinking in this Epistle of backsliding, but, rather, the sin of apostasy: a conscious decision to forsake Christ and return to Judaism and its system of worship, a system of works. Nevertheless, in application to us in our day, perhaps there is a reader who has made profession of salvation but has never really trusted

The writer to the Hebrews wrote at a time when the people of God were enduring trials and afflictions. Whilst his identity is uncertain to us, he was clearly known to his readers and he knew them. They were Hebrews but, more than that, they were those who professed to believe that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ – their Messiah and Saviour. His readers were disheartened as they found the way difficult. Since trusting Christ they had left the old system of worship, the law and the temple service, behind. They had suffered persecution and ridicule from their fellow countrymen, and watched as others who had professed to believe that Jesus was Messiah had turned from that profession and gone back to the temple and the offerings. What should they do? Should they go back, or should they carry on?

The writer takes up his pen and seeks to exhort and encourage his readers. In fact, the whole Epistle is said to be an 'exhortation in few words'. He blends together a wonderful ministry of the person of Christ with warnings and exhortations. He shows the glories of the new covenant and the things that God has in store for His children. He warns of the dreadful implications of going back to Judaism. His desire is that his readers, rather than going back will move forward, that they will strive for maturity in the faith.

Like all good teachers, the writer is not just content to convey the facts; he also wishes to make application to his readers – how the teaching should



Christ. To such a person may the exhortation speak forcibly, 'Let us therefore fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it'.

This phrase 'Let us' occurs four times in chapter 4. We will consider the fourth, which is found in verse 16, 'Let us therefore come boldly'. What a difference there is between the first occurrence and this one. Faith in a risen Saviour, and confidence in a great High Priest enables us to approach God boldly and not in a spirit of fear. The word 'therefore' points us back to what has gone before. In verses 14 and 15 we discover that we have a great High Priest who has gone into heaven himself and is in the presence of God for us. Note His qualification to be a high priest: He has suffered testing Himself. He was tempted like as we are, sin apart. There are some who teach that for the Lord Jesus to be qualified as our High Priest He could have sinned, even though He didn't. This is not true, for God 'cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man', Jas. 1. 13. Praise God, we have a High Priest who knows what it means to suffer. He knew hunger, thirst, weariness. He knew what it was like for men to hate him and persecute him. 'He knows what sorest trials mean for he has felt the same', ISAAC WATTS. If I sin, I do not need sympathy in my sin! I need one who will deal lovingly but faithfully with me, 'an advocate with the

Father', 1 John 2. 1. How privileged we are that we can approach a throne of grace and not a throne of judgement and we are encouraged to come boldly. We have at our disposal the resources of heaven. Let us take advantage of them. WILLIAM MACDONALD comments, 'His mercy covers the things we should not have done, and His grace empowers us to do what we should do but do not have the power to do'.¹

Two instances of the phrase occur in chapter 12 verse 1: 'let us lay aside every weight'; 'let us run with patience'. Again, the writer is looking back at what he has just said and seeks to apply this to himself and his readers. Chapter 11 is a catalogue of the heroes of faith. Along with a number of named individuals from the Old Testament, the writer says that time prevents him from speaking of many more who lived in faith and endured the persecutions of the world. He describes them: 'of whom the world was not worthy', 11. 38. It is the responsibility of believers in each generation to take their stand for God. The Christian life is likened to a race – not a sprint, but a marathon. We are told to run with patience, or endurance. It is not usual for runners in a marathon to weigh themselves down – all unnecessary items are removed to make running easier. In like manner, we too should remove from our lives those things which will hinder us, which will

slow us down. Some expositors take the phrase 'and the sin which doth so easily beset us' to refer specifically to the sin of apostasy. However, it is probably true of all believers that there are sins which affect us personally and what may be a problem to one may not be the same for another. Instead of being encouraged to run the race blindly, we are told to look unto Jesus, to consider His time on earth of endurance and humiliation – all for the joy that was before Him. G. W. FRAZER writes, 'Have I an object, Lord, below which would divide my heart from Thee; which would divert its even flow in answer to Thy constancy? Oh teach me quickly to return, and cause my heart afresh to burn'.

Many people like to wait for the beginning of a new year before making adjustments to their behaviour. Rather, we should examine ourselves constantly and make adjustment by the help of the Spirit of God. May we be encouraged by the exhortations contained within this tremendous Epistle and seek to live for the glory of God.

Endnotes

- 1 W. MACDONALD, *Believer's Bible Commentary* (New Testament), Thomas Nelson Publishers, Electronic Version.

STEPHEN SHERWIN is a member of the *Precious Seed Trust*





PROPERTY TRUSTS AND

Introduction

Whilst there is no example in the New Testament of an assembly having sole access to a building for its meetings, there are definite advantages in that facility being available. However, with those advantages come several legal responsibilities. For many of us, our interest in the building in which we meet amounts to little more than its cleanliness and order. When it is decided to redecorate or re-carpet, there may be a passing interest in the decision, although many leave it to those with the relevant expertise to arrange. But how often do we ever ask, 'Who owns the building?' To whom are we responsible when there is a need for a major refurbishment? What is the relationship between the assembly that meets in the building, and the owners of the building?

Apart from those believers who meet together in a community centre or other rented premises, most assemblies meet in a hall owned and managed by trustees. This issue of trusts and trusteeship is becoming more problematic as congregations become smaller, and the age profile of existing companies increases. An assembly that has a local trust may be faced with the situation where they no longer have a minimum number of trustees (usually three), or where trustees are now in their late seventies or eighties, and the work is too complex for them to manage successfully. What should they do? The purpose of this article is to lay out some of the options and to consider their implications; it is also a call to younger people. These matters may appear to be a diversion from the fundamental matters of doctrine and practice but, as we shall see, they are linked.

It should be borne in mind that arrangements for property trusts and trusteeship varies between different countries within the United Kingdom and abroad. Whilst this article focuses upon England and Wales, readers may wish to consider its issues in the light of their own national legal framework. Trusts generally fall into one of two categories, local trusts or national trusts. Where the property

is owned by a national trust, the trustees are Christians who may be located anywhere within the United Kingdom, but who are part of the national trust because of the expertise they bring to the work.

A local trust

A local trust will probably be made up of believers in the assembly who meet in the hall. It may contain one or more who have moved away from the locality but who are prepared to gather with fellow trustees to assist that assembly in the management of its premises. In the establishment of that trust, probably sometime in the past century, it was felt that trustees should either be in the fellowship, or be in the area and support the assembly in some aspect of its ministry. The advantage of such a trust was perceived to be the knowledge that local trustees would have – knowledge of the locality in which the assembly is seeking to witness.

Historically, local trustees were chosen for their spiritual qualities, many of them being elders within the local assembly occupying the building. In some cases, their secular activities may have given them an insight into the responsibilities they were to have as trustees of the building. However, at the time there were fewer regulations affecting their work, and this was not always deemed necessary.

One of the difficulties that exist for local trusts is their ability to remain cognizant of changing regulations and legislation. Briefing papers from such organizations as the Charities Commission are far more prolific today than they have ever been, and the regulations affecting those that have chosen to register their trusts as charities can entail a good deal of work in order to remain abreast of such matters. Is it possible for local trusts to keep in touch with their responsibilities successfully?

Legally, there is no need to register a local trust set up to manage the building with the Charities Commission. As it has no income, it does not exceed any income

thresholds that would necessitate such a registration, provided any income from the assembly meeting in the building is kept separate.

A national trust

National trusts usually have a committee of trustees drawn from a wide area. Such trustees are often chosen for their professional expertise, and the help that such expertise can bring to the work of a trust overseeing many different buildings. Clearly, the regulations affecting an organization with a sizeable portfolio of assets is far greater than one that looks after one building of relatively insignificant value. A national trust of any size will probably have trustees with knowledge in the design and maintenance of buildings, legal matters relating to property and charitable operations, financial and insurance issues, as well as planning and building regulations. That knowledge will have been enhanced over a number of years of varied experience, something that would be difficult for any local trust to replicate.

The issues affecting the transfer of trust property

In transferring a property from a local to a national trust the following factors need to be borne in mind:

- The ownership of the property will be transferred – it will no longer belong to the local trustees or the assembly that meets within it.
- As ownership is transferred, the assembly using the building will become liable to pay rent as tenants. Some national trusts seek to introduce formal tenancy agreements between the trust and the assembly, and these agreements need to be scrutinised carefully as they are legal documents and will have implications for the assembly. As longstanding tenants there is no legal obligation to sign such an agreement. One national trust indicates that its standard minimum rent is £300 per year.¹ This may be lower for other trusts but the cost needs to be borne in mind, as well as the ability of the property owner to raise



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the rent at any point, subject to appropriate notice periods.

- Although the local assembly no longer owns the building, they will still be responsible for its repair and maintenance. The national trust may offer grants to meet significant expenses, but they could also charge interest on any loan they make. All expenditure by the local assembly in the maintenance of the building will be realized by the national trust should the testimony close.
- Should the testimony close, the proceeds of any sale of the building would go to the national trust who would decide where those proceeds should be disbursed. In some cases this might see former assembly-based investment in property sold, and the proceeds given to activities and organizations which have little commitment to scriptural principles.
- Any local trust that is seeking to transfer its property to a national trust should make a detailed comparison between its own statement of doctrine and practice and that of the national trust – this comparison should not just look for what is included, but what is missing. Sadly, some trust statements are so broad as to give no protection for an assembly that is committed to the maintenance of New Testament doctrines and principles, particularly in relation to prophetic and church truth.
- Are the trustees of the national trust in assembly fellowship and sympathetic to those companies following New Testament teaching? Even if a few are, this could quickly change. It must be remembered that the national trust could allow the building to be occupied by others whose practices are far removed from the principles of a New Testament assembly.

Alternatives to the transfer of property to a national trust are either to appoint the national trust as 'sole trustee', or 'custodian trustee'. Whether some national trusts can offer either or both of the options would have to

be investigated on an individual basis. The sole trusteeship option will not be considered here.

Holding or custodian trusteeship

Custodian trusteeship is a special kind of trusteeship arrangement that can be made between local trustees and a national trust.² Under such an arrangement, although the legal title of the building/land is vested in the custodian, full control over the building/land and its use remains with the local trustees – these are usually referred to as 'the managing trustees'.

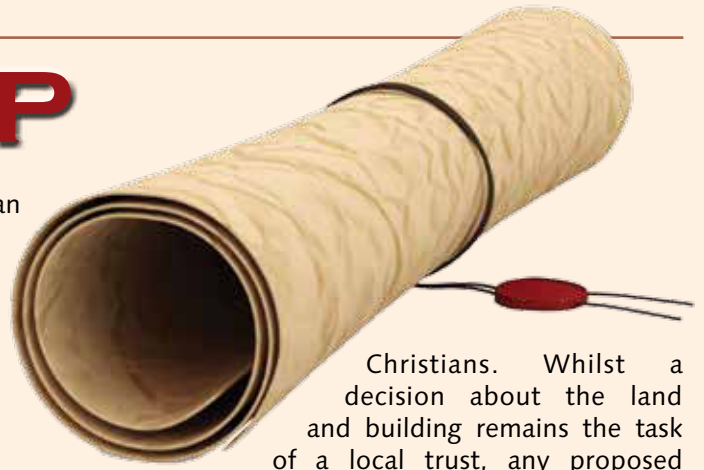
The particular advantage of this option is that local trustees retain control of the building and its use. There is also some safeguarding in that local trustees avoid the need to transfer the legal title each time there is a change of managing trustees, thus saving legal costs and, where relevant, Land Registry fees. It can also ensure that any potential problems with the legal title if trustees forget to transfer the land title to new trustees are avoided.

What must be remembered, if such a route is chosen, is:

- There has to be provision within the local trust's documentation to ensure that custodian trusteeship can be explored;
- There will be a significant legal cost to this type of trusteeship being set up – one national trust quotes costs from £700 upwards which would have to be borne by the local assembly;
- Some national trusts will charge an annual fee to the local assembly to remain as custodian trustees;
- That should the local assembly cease to function, the legal title to the building and land may well rest with the national trust (see point 3 above).³

Conclusion

The responsibility of trusteeship for any building is significant, some might say onerous, and it presents an on-going problem to companies of



Christians. Whilst a decision about the land and building remains the task of a local trust, any proposed change to that arrangement should be researched very carefully.

In that process, there are a few helps. Some national trusts have websites, and this can offer information on their services and costs. A certain amount of information can be gleaned from the Charity Commission website, as each national trust should be registered and their trustees listed. Whilst this site offers some simple information on accounts and statements of doctrine and practice, the real impact upon individual trusts can be difficult to determine. Overall, there is no substitute for talking to other believers who have their own experiences to share.

The concern that some believers have is the growth of national trusts and the significant assets that they now control. A cursory glance through their registered accounts can reveal property in excess of £10 million but, sadly, much of their income is donated to organizations and activities that no longer adhere to New Testament truth.

Endnotes

- 1 See, for example, [http://www.churchgrowth.org.uk/admin/userfiles/briefing_papers/Support%20for%20property%20trustees%20\(May2014\).pdf](http://www.churchgrowth.org.uk/admin/userfiles/briefing_papers/Support%20for%20property%20trustees%20(May2014).pdf) – Appendix B
- 2 See https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/352608/CC42-PDF.pdf for further information.
- 3 Some national trusts do allow for the transfer of the legal title of the building/land back to the local trust at any point, but they may make a significant charge to the local assembly to enable this to happen.

This article is a compilation of material from different sources. However, questions on this thorny issue may be directed to the General Editor.



is the answer

1 Corinthians 13

By **HARRY BELL** Jarrow, England

Love is the solution of all such difficulties as those at Corinth. In the 1st Epistle to Corinthians we can trace:

(A) A twelve-fold might of love

If love ruled, there would be:

- 1 no division, as in chapters 1-3, for love seeks not her own, and is not quickly roused to anger, nor does love impute evil, v. 5;
- 2 no worldly ease, as in chapter 4, since love endures all things, even as the apostles endured buffeting and hunger, 4. 11;
- 3 no lustfulness, as in chapter 5, for love does not covet or lust;
- 4 no legal strife, as in chapter 6, for, again, love seeks not her own, v. 5, but 'beareth all things', v. 7;
- 5 no domestic disorder, as in chapter 7, for love is the bond of perfectness, Col. 3. 14, and so the bond of peace;
- 6 no bad testimony, as in chapter 8, for love tenderly considers the conscientious views of weak ones lest they be stumbled, 8. 10-13, and sacrifices its own liberty to serve this end;
- 7 no denying Paul's apostleship, as in chapter 9, for love rejoices in the truth, v. 6, and would rejoice in the great truth of Paul's gospel and church ministry;
- 8 no defiling of the Lord's Table, as in chapter 10, for love does not behave itself unseemly, v. 5, and is, indeed, the fulfilment of the whole law, Rom. 13. 10;
- 9 no disregard of fellow saints, as in chapter 11, for love 'vaunteth not itself' as the unworthy eaters were doing, 11. 27;
- 10 no misuse of gift, as in chapters 12-14, for love edifieth not itself, but the church of God;
- 11 no erroneous doctrine, as in chapter 15, for love rejoices in the truth, v. 6, the declared truth

of the gospel, 15. 1;

- 12 no withholding of money, as in chapter 16, for love is kind, v. 4, and unselfish, v. 5.

Accordingly, so vital is love in assembly life and activity that we have in chapter 12 verse 31 the *exhortation* to love, in chapter 13 the *explanation* of love, and in chapter 14 verse 1 the *emulation* of love.

(B) The explanation of love

If now we take up the explanation of love, as given in this precious chapter, we have there clearly brought to view five three-fold glories of love:

- A three-fold assertion of its effects, vv. 1-3:
 - 1 Though I speak, I accomplish nothing, v. 1;
 - 2 Though I have everything, I am nothing, v. 2;
 - 3 Though I give love, I gain nothing, v. 3.
- A three-fold description of its energies, vv. 4-8:
 - 1 What love *does not* do, vv. 4-6. It does not envy, is not insolent or rash, is not puffed up, does not behave in an unseemly manner, does not seek its own place or prominence or self-importance, is not quickly provoked, does not impute evil, and does not rejoice at iniquity;
 - 2 What love *does* do, vv. 6, 7. It rejoices in the truth, bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things;
 - 3 What love *will never* do, v. 8. It will never be done away, will never give place to a better thing; it will never cease.
- A three-fold contrast as to its endurance, vv. 8, 9:

- 1 Prophecies fail;
- 2 Tongues cease;
- 3 Knowledge vanishes away, but love remains; it endures for ever and ever; it is an abiding thing.

- A three-fold figure of its enlightening effect, vv. 11, 12:
 - 1 The child, v. 11 – Perception. Our understanding of divine truth is partial now because of the limitations of our nature, but then understanding will be complete;
 - 2 The mirror, v. 12 – Reflection. Our contact with the Lord now is through the medium of the Spirit and the word, but then it will be immediate and direct;
 - 3 The enigma, v. 12, Greek, translated 'darkly' – Initiation. Truth at present is conveyed to us by parable, metaphor, symbol, etc., but then all will be clear and explicit. But when we reach that blissful state of completeness, love will ever remain as the prevailing element in which we move, act, and live.
- A three-fold comparison of its excellence, v. 13:
 - 1 Faith – Apprehension. The depth of faith. Faith apprehends Christ, and its roots go deeply down into solid earth;
 - 2 Hope – Anticipation. The height of hope. Hope anticipates glory, and carries us to sublime heights of expectancy;
 - 3 Love – Affection. The breadth of love. Love takes in all, excluding none.

HARRY BELL went to be with the Lord in the 1970s. This article was first published in 1955, Volume 7 Number 5. It is available here: http://www.preciousseed.org/article_detail.cfm?articleID=1732.

THE EPISTLE TO PHILEMON

By JOHN BENNETT Kirkby-in-Ashfield, England

2

Onesimus' Restoration

'Thou therefore receive him', v. 12;¹ 'receive him as myself', v. 17.

Here is the nub of this letter. It is, in effect, a letter of commendation from Paul to Philemon with regard to Onesimus.

Here we need to consider the reality of the situation. Onesimus was a slave. As such, he was the property of Philemon; he would have paid a price to purchase Onesimus, possibly in the slave market in Colossae. From the words of verse 18 it would appear that Onesimus then stole from Philemon as a means of funding his escape from slavery and to support his journey to Rome. Onesimus has probably committed a double wrong – to abscond and to steal.

For a slave to abscond cast doubts upon Philemon's relationships with his slaves. What sort of a master was he? Then the financial losses that Philemon must have suffered could well have been considerable. Now Onesimus has arrived back with a letter asking Philemon to take him back. If we have ever been wronged, judged unfairly, treated badly, or suffered unnecessary losses, we might begin to appreciate the natural response of Philemon. If we have invested time in someone only to see them fail, and even betray our trust, we can understand a little of what Paul is asking of this man.

However, this letter to Philemon does not just ask Philemon to take back this erring slave, but to **'receive him as myself', v. 17**. If we go back to the terms that Paul uses in describing his relationship with Philemon and his wife: **'Paul . . . unto Philemon our dearly beloved, and fellowlabourer, and to our beloved Apphia', vv. 1-2**, we might appreciate a little of what Paul is asking. Take this runaway slave back, forgive him, restore him to your employment, accept him as a brother in Christ, and receive him into the fellowship of the local assembly. Verses 15-16 confirm this: **'receive him for ever; not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved'**.

Is there a root of bitterness? Is there some lurking ill that we might feel toward such an individual? What is it that might motivate us in circumstances like this? Paul wrote to the Colossians, 'And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven. And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight', Col. 1. 20-22. As

Philemon was a Colossian, these verses may well have resonated with him. Think, says Paul, of what the Lord has done for us, worthless sinners at enmity with Him. He has effected the restoration and, more than that, He has brought us into fellowship with Divine persons. We should not underestimate the difficulty that faced Philemon but neither should we question the extent of what Christ has done for us!

There is a second aspect to Paul's argument here: **'Whom I would have retained with me', v. 13**. Paul would have Philemon to appreciate what Onesimus meant to him. A bond of affection had developed between the two, not just because of their common lot as Roman prisoners, but as fellow believers in Christ. Paul also expresses his own desire in the matter – **'I would have'**. After much deliberation, Paul does not choose what he might want but what is right in the present circumstances. Paul was putting aside his own situation and the need arising from it² in order that Onesimus might return to Philemon. It would have been simple to retain Onesimus and view it as Paul describes it: **'that in thy stead he might have ministered unto me'**. If Onesimus and Philemon were to change places, Paul is confident that Philemon would have sought to bring comfort to the imprisoned apostle. However, Onesimus had assumed that role.

The word that Paul uses for Onesimus' service, **'ministered unto me'**, is significant. We cannot forget that Onesimus was a slave, *doulos*, but Paul does not use that term in relation to his ministry here, but rather the word, *diakoneo*, from which we get our word deacon. That change that had been wrought by Divine grace elevates the service of the man. Even though Onesimus may have been a menial slave socially, he was capable of, and fitted for, the highest service for the Lord.

So why didn't Paul retain the runaway slave? Verse 14 explains, **'without thy mind would I do nothing'**. The practical import of this simple statement is quite telling. Paul's own preference was to retain Onesimus. The slave could have provided a much needed ministry to the apostle, a ministry that Philemon would have fulfilled himself, had he been in Rome. Wasn't Paul's need greater than that of Philemon? However, the principle that Paul is emphasizing by his own actions is that of consent. As SCROGGIE WRITES, 'two great words are here brought together, necessity and free-will. The power of one is the law, and of the other love. There is a whole distance between compulsion and spontaneity, between the dictates of duty and the desire which is a delight'.³ The appeal of the prisoner is to be contrasted with the command of the apostle. The one would foster willing commitment, whereas the other grudging acceptance.

The Revelation of Divine Purpose – **'he therefore departed for a season', v. 15.**

What Paul writes here is significant. Darby's translation puts it this way: 'for perhaps for this reason he has been separated from thee for a time'. The difference is that Darby wishes to convey the passive nature of the verb. If we follow the KJV, Onesimus was responsible for his own actions – **'he . . . departed'**. From JND we get a different idea, 'he has been separated', RV, 'he was . . . parted'.⁴ It suggests that Onesimus was not wholly responsible for his actions; someone else was at work here.

It is worth reading Genesis chapter 45 alongside this verse and thinking on Joseph's words to his brethren. Standing now as second only to Pharaoh in Egypt, Joseph says to his brethren, 'So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God', v. 8.

This is the blessing of hindsight: the ability to look back upon circumstances and see how God has used them for our ultimate blessing. But what did we think at the time? How did Philemon feel when he discovered what Onesimus had done? The ways of God were not clear then. Here was a man who was clearly loved by the apostle, busy in the work of the Lord in his own locality, the assembly met in his house, and yet such events overtake him at the very heart of his domestic and spiritual life. Why?

At the time that Onesimus absconded I doubt Philemon would have been able to see the eventual outcome. As Joseph was sold into slavery with the Midianites, I'm sure he did not envisage that this would ultimately lead to him being second in Egypt. If we are passing through hard places we may take courage and find strength by realizing, as Philemon was brought to appreciate, that God is in control and is working out His purposes still.

'Not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved', v. 16. This statement expands upon what the grace of God has wrought. It is not just that Onesimus has returned. It is not just that Onesimus has returned as a fellow-believer, although that is true. It is that the relationship of the master to the slave has been changed. Onesimus is now **'a brother beloved'**. He is returning a changed man, and a much better slave than before. He will serve as a brother in Christ, conscious that as he is serving Philemon he is serving the Lord.⁵ However, there is a further development. The word 'brother' is, as CRISWELL points out, 'the word denoting blood kinship'.⁶ Their spiritual kinship owes everything to the shed blood of Christ, denoting His work upon the cross. This brings Onesimus onto a higher level. He is a fellow believer but one who enjoys the Christian love of the apostle, and should, in the same way, enjoy the Christian affection of Philemon.⁷

Apart from the Pauline appeal that implies Divine purpose, Paul also appeals to Philemon as **'a**

partner', v. 17. Paul's argument is quite simple. If, as is the case, you, Philemon, judge me, Paul, to have common hopes and interests, then receive Onesimus as you would receive me. As DIEBLER states, 'If Philemon rejected Onesimus, it would be like rejecting the apostle, his friend, v. 1, fellow worker, v. 1, brother, v. 7, 20, and even partner, v. 17. Such would, of course, be unthinkable'.⁸

Appropriate Reparation – **'If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account', v. 18.**

In all the rejoicing in this man's salvation, Paul was cognizant of the fact that certain issues from Onesimus' past life now needed to be resolved. He needed to make his peace, and accomplish restitution with Philemon. That principle is exemplified in the case of Zacchaeus. When the Lord bid him come down from the tree, Zacchaeus responded by saying, 'Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold', Luke 19. 8. This was a demonstration of the reality of the man's salvation, and his desire to right the wrongs he had committed in his past life, wherever that was outstanding and might be possible. GRAHAM SCROGGIE wrote, 'new life does not cancel old debt'.⁹ That principle is evident here in relation to Onesimus.

Onesimus had, as it were, an outstanding debt that needed to be cleared. He had a moral and legal obligation to Philemon that needed to be addressed. The 'If' that commences the verse is not an 'if' of doubt but rather 'since', or 'if, as is the case'. In relation to the phrase **'oweth thee ought'**, MEYER comments: 'This applies to a *money-debt*. Accordingly the slave had probably been guilty, not merely in general of a fault in service which injured his master . . . but in reality . . . of purloining or of embezzlement, which Paul here knows how to indicate euphemistically. The referring it merely to the *running away* itself, and the *neglect of service* therewith connected, would not be . . . in keeping with the hypothetical form of expression'.¹⁰

In this instance, Paul offers another solution. As Christ took all the believer's sin and suffered the judgement of God for that sin, Paul acts in a similar way in respect to Onesimus – **'put that on mine account'**, he says. The word used is an accounting term meaning to charge what is owed by Onesimus to Paul. Sometimes it is not possible for the individual to put right what has been done wrongly. Here Paul did not ask Philemon to write off the debt. He put himself forward as guarantor – he would repay. What a heart Paul had – what shepherd care he demonstrates. What a challenge to us!

As if to confirm that the offer is genuine, **'I Paul have written it with mine own hand', v. 19.** It was like a promissory note. 'Some think that Paul

here took the pen from the scribe and penned these lines himself. More probable is the view that he wrote the entire letter himself with his own hand. This would be unusual, for Paul usually dictated his letters to an amanuensis. It seems hardly probable that Paul would employ the services of a scribe for such a brief, friendly, and semiprivate letter'.¹¹

How, then, might Paul have repaid this debt owed by Onesimus? Whilst in prison, or, at best, under house arrest, how would Paul have gained, or earned the money? Is the latter part of verse 19 merely a suggestion by Paul to avoid having to pay the debt he had just taken on?

Paul points out to Philemon what spiritual blessing had been brought to him when he got saved through the preaching of the apostle – **'thou owest unto me even thine own self besides'**. Equally, the return of Onesimus as a consequence, again, of Paul's evangelistic efforts, and his discipling of the slave, means that Philemon is indebted on this account as well. The purpose of this reminder is not to escape the payment of the debt he had promised to pay. In what Paul has said of the character of Philemon, verses 4-7, he could have presumed upon Philemon's good nature. Rather, Paul turns to a principle of biblical forgiveness which Philemon had experienced in his salvation and that now Paul expects him to demonstrate in his treatment of Onesimus.

Return for the Apostle – **'but withal prepare me also a lodging', v. 22.**

It was Paul's hope to make a visit to Philemon and to Colossae. On what basis were Paul's hopes founded? Were they not based upon the prayers of Philemon and his family, and, probably, the assembly? We saw, earlier, something of Paul's prayers for them. Now he speaks of their prayers for him. This is a challenge to our own prayer life. To what extent do we pray regularly and intelligently for other believers, especially those in need?

It is important to realize that Paul knew that many were praying for him. He had requested this in Colossians chapter 4. However, here is a statement of Paul's belief that prayer has value, and that he expects God to grant their request. God answers prayer! On what basis, then, did Paul 'trust', or hope?

The subject of prayer is far too complex to deal with in an exposition of Philemon alone. However, Paul clearly expected God to answer the prayers of the Colossian saints. Was it because, as some suggest, God changes the way He acts as a consequence of prayer?¹² As always, we need to be careful to heed scripture. We note:

- **'I trust'**. There is no assumption or certainty about this statement. God does answer prayer,

but we must not assume that because we pray God must move in the way that we pray. God's answers may not be in accordance with our prayers or our timeframe for those prayers.

- **'I shall be given unto you'**. Paul recognized that the answer to the prayers of his friends and fellow saints was in the will of God. It would be an act of God's grace if Paul was to be released. Though the prayers of believers might entreat God for this favour this was in God's sovereign will alone.¹³

SCROGGIE offers a thought here: 'Peter's friends prayed that he might be released from prison, and he was. Do you suppose that the Church did not pray for Stephen? Yet he was martyred. In both instances the will of God was done, and in each instance there was surprise'.¹⁴

Of one thing Paul could be assured. If he asked then he was confident that Philemon would obey – **'having confidence in thy obedience', v. 21.** Perhaps it is this fact that gives the apostle the degree of hope that he expresses. Such was the bond of affection between Philemon and Paul that though Paul was not present he could rely upon Philemon to receive Onesimus in the way specified. The outcomes of this action would be:

- **'joy . . . in the Lord', v. 20.** Literally, 'profit from thee in the Lord'.¹⁵ What spiritual benefit would be gained through the willing obedience of Philemon in this most difficult of situations! What a testimony would accrue!
- **'cheer . . . in Christ', v. 20** WUEST. That which Philemon ministered to the saints, v. 7, would be ministered in an abundant measure to Paul in the midst of his confinement in prison.

If Paul was not released to visit Philemon in person, then there was plenty that could be done to enhance the gospel and encourage the apostle.

The Reminders of the work and the workers, vv. 23-25

As the apostle draws this letter to its conclusion, he names, and sends salutations from, a number of his friends.

Epaphras – 'my fellowprisoner in Christ Jesus', v. 23. The high commendation of this man is given us in Colossians chapter 4 verses 12-13. The fact that he is mentioned separately here indicates the nature of his service and also the fact that he was a Colossian and probably known to Philemon. He is described as a **'fellow prisoner'**. We are not told what was the cause of his imprisonment. However, as HIEBERT suggests, this may well indicate that Epaphras shared the confinement of the apostle voluntarily in order that he might minister to him.¹⁶

'Marcus', v. 24

It is interesting that John Mark should be mentioned here. In Acts chapter 13 we are told that 'John departed from them', v. 13. He had left Paul and Barnabas' first missionary journey. Later, in Acts chapter 15, he was the subject of a dispute between Paul and Barnabas that led to the splitting up of the partnership that had been at the heart of a work for God. Now, John Mark is back, showing a different level of commitment to Paul and the work of the Lord through him.

There are some similarities between Paul's experience with John Mark and what Paul was asking of Philemon in relation to Onesimus. As John Mark was clearly a changed man, so was Onesimus. As Paul had accepted John Mark back into his band of missionaries, so Paul was asking Philemon to receive back the once erring slave Onesimus. Under the hand of God positive change is possible!

'Aristarchus'

Aristarchus was a Thessalonian, Acts 20. 4. He was one who accompanied the apostle into Asia and was involved in the voyage to Rome that ended in shipwreck, 27. 2. This is indicative of the degree of fellowship that this man showed, and further proof of the spiritual progress evident in the man and the assembly from which he came.

'Demas'

The three times that Demas is mentioned in scripture are in Colossians chapter 4, here, and, later, in 2 Timothy chapter 4. If John Mark is an example of a man who started badly and finished well, Demas seems to be a man who started with promise but ended badly. Paul's comments about him are telling: 'For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica', v. 10.

'Lucas'

Luke, known as 'the beloved physician', Col. 4. 14, was one who remained with Paul until the very end of his life. Indeed, there is a sense of sadness when the apostle says, 'Only Luke is with me', 2 Tim. 4. 11. As Paul faced death it seemed few were prepared to take their stand with him publicly. Luke is an example of consistency and faithfulness in the work of the Lord.

'The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen', v. 25. The Epistle ends as it began. Divine grace had brought them to salvation. That same grace was available to them as a constant resource, v. 3, as well as present supply in the present circumstances. The resources of God are sure. That which is necessary for the Christian's daily walk can be relied upon!

MACLAREN summarizes the epistle as follows: 'Thus, on the whole, in this letter, the central springs of Christian service are touched, and the motives used

to sway Philemon are the echo of the motives which Christ uses to sway men. The keynote of all is love. Love beseeches when it might command . . . Love will do nothing without the glad consent of him to whom it speaks, and cares for no service which is of necessity . . . Love identifies itself with those who need its help, and treats kindnesses to them as done to itself. Love finds joy and heart solace in willing, though it be imperfect, service. Love expects more than it asks. Love hopes for reunion, and by the hope makes its wish more weighty. These are the points of Paul's pleading with Philemon. Are they not the elements of Christ's pleading with His friends?'.¹⁷

Endnotes

- 1 Alford, JND, RV, ESV, Wuest, NIV, all suggest this phrase belongs in verse 17 but not here.
- 2 'He was a sufferer, a captive; he was among strangers, people not predisposed towards him; he was old and worn and in need of loving attention', SCROGGIE, pg. 60.
- 3 W. GRAHAM SCROGGIE, *Studies in Philemon*, Kregel, 1977, pg. 64.
- 4 For a fuller explanation of this point see: FRITZ RIENECKER, and CLEON ROGERS, *Linguistic key to the Greek New Testament*, Zondervan, 1980, pg. 660.
- 5 'The former social relation of master towards slave is maintained. But a new spirit and disposition will henceforth govern that relation', JAC J. MULLER, *The Epistles of Paul to the Philippians and Philemon* (part of *The New London Commentary on the New Testament*), Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1955, pg. 185.
- 6 W. A. CRISWELL (ED.), *Believer's Study Bible*, Nelson, 1991. [electronic edition].
- 7 'Accordingly, 'in the flesh' Philemon has the brother as a slave, and 'in the Lord' the slave as a brother', H. A. W. MEYER, *New Testament Commentary*, T&T Clarke, 1883. [electronic edition].
- 8 EDWIN C. DIEBLER, *Philemon*, in WALVOORD AND ZUCK, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Dallas Theological Seminary. [electronic edition].
- 9 W. GRAHAM SCROGGIE, *Studies in Philemon*, Kregel, 1977, pg. 79.
- 10 H. A. W. MEYER, *New Testament Commentary*, T&T Clarke, 1883. [electronic edition]. [Italics the author's].
- 11 D. EDMOND HIEBERT, *Titus and Philemon*, Moody Press, Chicago, 1957, pg. 119.
- 12 See, for example, WAYNE GRUDEM, *Systematic Theology*, IVP, 2007, pg. 377.
- 13 'The passive voice [of the verb] suggests that it is God who alone can secure Paul's release, though Paul relies on the prayers of the community to entreat God for this favour', FRITZ RIENECKER, and CLEON ROGERS, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, Zondervan, 1980, pg. 661.
- 14 W. GRAHAM SCROGGIE, *Studies in Philemon*, Kregel, 1977, pg. 95.
- 15 A. T. ROBERTSON, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Harper, 1930. [electronic edition]
- 16 D. EDMOND HIEBERT, *Titus and Philemon*, Moody Press, Chicago, 1957, pg. 125.
- 17 ALEXANDER MACLAREN, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*. [electronic edition]



CHARLES GAHAN

'Where there are not faithful ministers of the word of God, the people decay', Prov. 29. 18 GNV.

The background to the biblical text quoted is likely to have been Exodus chapter 32 verses 25-26, where Moses calls upon the people of God to break away from spiritually wrong practices and show their faithfulness and loyalty to the Lord, and to His word. In 1945, a small group of believers were similarly exercised in what they perceived at the time as the pressing need to reaffirm New Testament Church principles in the assemblies.

Leading this group of concerned believers was Charles Gahan, a peripatetic evangelist and Bible teacher, who, along with others, met at a conference in Taunton, Somerset to determine the way forward. The decision that these brethren came to was to publish a new magazine, entitled *Precious Seed*, which first appeared in print in September 1945. Later, in an editorial in 1954, Charles Gahan gave a brief resume in retrospect as to how the magazine had come into existence and its *raison d'être*. He stated, amongst other things, that:

'To launch a new magazine during the difficult closing days of the Second World War was no small undertaking, and it was only under a deep sense of urgency and responsibility that we ventured to do so . . . and a number of brethren from various parts of England reached the unanimous conclusion that the situation called for wider systematic instruction in Scriptural principles of gathering, and the encouragement of greater interest in the work carried on in connection with such gatherings. It was the considered opinion of these brethren that the need could best be met by publishing an attractive magazine containing sound exposition of New Testament principles of worship and service, together with reliable information of evangelistic work carried on in connection with the assemblies of the Lord's people . . . In view of this, and all the circumstances of the case, they were satisfied that a magazine with these special objects in view was amply justified. *Precious Seed*, therefore, was born out of the deep conviction that the great need of the moment was a reaffirmation of the vital importance

of New Testament Church principles in assembly life and service'.¹

It seems, as well, that the ethos of the new magazine would be to encourage individual study of the scriptures so that, paraphrasing Luke chapter 1 verse 4, 'their readers might be certain about the things that they had been taught'.

Inevitably, when something new appears, there will always be those who are quick to judge motives, and Charles Gahan knew what it meant to endure the slings and arrows of criticism. He was a man, however, of great conviction and resilience, as evident from the fact that he had once been imprisoned for being a conscientious objector during the First World War. Surprisingly, one of the major critics of the new magazine was the then editor of *The Harvester*, Frederick Tatford, who insisted that there was no need to produce a new magazine as it would simply be a duplication of the objectives of that magazine. It is clear, though, from the comments of TIM GRASS that, 'the difference between the two publications is immediately evident, and this appears to have been one of those occasions where Tatford's irritation got the better of his editorial judgment'.²

Undaunted, Charles Gahan continued to be involved with the work of the magazine as Secretary and Chairman of the Committee for over 27 years. In that period of time circulation increased exponentially until it peaked at over 20,000 copies per issue. Although the original intention of the first Committee overseeing this work was that it would primarily be for distribution in the South West of England and South Wales, it soon circulated throughout the United Kingdom, and the regions beyond. Today, the magazine has been rebranded '*International*', which is a measure of how well respected it is throughout the English-speaking world. The magazine has run continuously since 1945, and this year marks the seventieth anniversary of its publication. Although it has undergone certain changes over the years, it has never lost the vision that Charles Gahan *et al* articulated at the outset of their endeavours.

Charles Gahan was born in Liverpool in 1895, but spent most of his service for

the Lord in the Barking area of London, and South West England. He devoted his energies to evangelism, and the teaching of the word of God. Through his pioneer work, especially in Open Air activity, including the use of a Gospel Caravan, and Tent Missions, many individuals were saved, and a number of assemblies were established following these different forms of outreach. There are still individuals alive today (one in the writer's own assembly) who owe much to his pastoral care and words of encouragement. During his lifetime he wrote a number of excellent articles for *Precious Seed*, which can still be read online. Here is an example of both his spiritual and judicious insight as he handled the difficult subject of 'election' in Ephesians chapter 2 verses 21-22, 'It is the Habitation of His Choice. The Church, the habitation of God, is a chosen Church and its members are a chosen people. The New Testament word for this doctrine is the word "elect" or "election", and few words have given rise to more heart-burnings than these. Nevertheless, it would be foolish to allow this to hide its importance from our view; as we are at present constituted we can only know a part of God's ways. To us there may seem to be strange discrepancies and perplexities in the doctrine of election, but it is only seemingly so. God is just in all His ways: "Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne", Psa. 89. 14; we must patiently wait the dawning of that glorious morning when the light of perfect comprehension will make all things clear and plain. That God has an elect people the Scriptures abundantly show: "God who hath saved us ... not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began", 2 Tim. 1. 9'.³

Other assembly publications have discontinued for a variety of reasons, but *Precious Seed International* continues to be read across the world, either in hard copy or online. A fitting tribute, then, to Charles Gahan, and those likeminded brethren whose faith we are encouraged to follow, Heb. 13. 7.

Endnotes

- 1 *Precious Seed* Volume 6 Issue 2, 1954.
- 2 TIM GRASS, *Gathering to His Name*, Paternoster, 2006, pg. 401.
- 3 *Precious Seed* Volume 24 Issue 4, 1973.



Introduction

Many people define themselves by the work they do. As Christians we are called to work for the Lord. He calls us, equips us, and defines the sphere of our labours and, in a coming day, He will review and reward us. As the apostles faced the daunting task of world evangelism, it was reassuring to know that the Lord was working with them.¹ We may be just as sure that He will be with us. Scripture teaches, however, that our labour could be useless if undertaken with unworthy motives.² The indispensable motivation is love to Christ, driven by a burning sense of His love for us.³

'I would not work my soul to save,
That work my Lord has done;
But I would work like any slave
For love of God's dear Son'.

This paper surveys the topic of working for God.⁴ We begin by observing that God sets an example to us by His glorious workmanship both in creation and redemption. The main part of the paper surveys spiritual work as depicted by three disciplines: agriculture, construction, and care. We conclude on the solemn subject of review and reward.

God's workmanship

The opening chapters of the Bible present God as the consummate workman. He calls the universe into being, and perfects the heavens and earth by His handiwork in His six great creative days. He takes *pleasure* in His work.⁵ Following this He *rests* on the seventh day, setting a pattern for mankind thereafter. Work – the

THE BELIEVER AS A

By **KEN TOTTON** Cambridge, England [Unless otherwise stated, scripture quotations

Creator's appointment – is seen to be good for man, tending and developing that which God had created.⁶ Following the fall, work remains God's appointment, but its character changes to arduous toil. Whilst the focus of this paper is spiritual work, each of us should see our workaday lives as God's gracious provision for us, and a vital means whereby we can serve and glorify Him.

The physical creation becomes the environment in which a far greater work of God takes place, the work of redemption. The Lord could say: 'The Father works hitherto and I work'.⁷ Paul reminds the Ephesians that 'we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works'.⁸ God is the supreme architect and builder, and the magnificence of His city will be the wonder of the eternal world.⁹ God is characterized by boundless initiative and creativity, and His beloved Son could say, 'I must work the works of Him that sent me'.¹⁰ All this effort on the part of divine persons surely points us to our responsibilities as His blessed and grateful people.

Fellow-workers

Work, especially its near-relation 'labour', can be daunting and discouraging if undertaken alone. The New Testament word for labour, *kopiaō*, denotes work which involves weariness, toil, and distress. How much of this do we experience as we seek to serve the Lord?

Happily God commends *fellowship* in His work: 'Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labour', Eccles. 4. 9. Older and younger, males and females, Jews and Gentiles – all are included. The word translated 'fellow-workers' occurs thirteen times in the New Testament and provides an interesting study.¹¹ Priscilla and Aquila, who had supported Paul in many ways, are so designated. Titus brought comfort to Paul at a time of bitter heartache arising from opposition at Corinth. Various other close associates of Paul are thus described, those who are 'fellow-workers in Christ' (communion); 'God's fellow-labourers' (divine sovereignty); 'in the gospel' (responsibility); 'unto the kingdom of God' (objective). Providing hospitality for these workers was an enriching experience, and thereby saints could be 'fellow-workers for the truth'. May we each rejoice in the strength and encouragement of unity in promoting the gospel.

Farming

Many valuable spiritual lessons can be derived from what the Bible has to say about agricultural work.

Assuredly the Lord of the harvest is still thrusting forth labourers into His harvest.¹² Of first importance is the fact that regardless of the workers' expertise, they are absolutely cast upon God for successful growth: 'God gives the increase'.¹³ At the same time there is a great diversity of operations such as ploughing, cultivation, sowing, reaping, and gleaning. All these need to be carefully coordinated if the desired harvest is to be secured. Ploughing is tough work, and is to be undertaken in hope.¹⁴ In an age of widespread ignorance of scripture, the preparatory activity of teaching the





WORKER

itions are from NKJV]

ABCs of divine truth is an inescapable first step in our evangelism. Sowing directs our thoughts to the preaching of the word, 'the seed is the word of God'; 'the field is the world'.¹⁵ In the great gospel harvest, there is scope for all to engage.

Abundant patience is required, for harvests are not reaped immediately, but only after painstaking cultivation and dependence upon God: 'See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain'.¹⁶

Evaluation of results needs to be undertaken with care. Sometimes, we will labour to the point of exhaustion with little visible result; at other times we may reap with comparatively little effort.¹⁷ Both despair on the one hand and triumphalism on the other would be alike inappropriate. God has ways of encouraging us, whilst keeping our feet firmly on the ground!¹⁸

Building

Construction work is often referred to in both Testaments. In connection with the tabernacle in the wilderness, a wide range of skills were engaged in its construction. Wise-hearted women spun yarns to produce the beautiful fabric for the tabernacle and the priestly garments. Skilled workers, Bezaleel and Aholiab, were specially endued with the Spirit of God to construct the sacred vessels, according to the pattern disclosed to Moses. What glory descended on the tabernacle when, at length, all was completed, erected, and sanctified according to God's plan!

Today, we do not construct material temples, but each of us can surely build for God. With reference to the founding of the church in Corinth, Paul describes himself as a 'wise master-builder', laying the essential foundation which is Jesus Christ. Other workers then add a superstructure, 'But let each one take heed how he builds on it'.¹⁹ Contextually, the focus is on teaching calculated to build up the

local assembly, but undoubtedly the principle may be applied more broadly.

All conscientious tradespeople wish to do a good job. Why should the service of God be thought different? Hence, Paul exhorts Timothy, 'Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth'.²⁰ We learn by practice, and often from our mistakes. Praise God, He is graciously at work *in* us, as well as *through* us.

Caring

In the parable of the Good Samaritan, the charge to the inn-keeper in respect of the rescued man was, 'Take care of him'.²¹ One of the most urgent works today is the care and cure of souls. The local church should be an environment where love and care is extended to those who have been battered and bruised by sin and Satan. Far from being an exclusive club for a spiritual elite, it should resemble a hospital²² where Christians are nursed to spiritual health, fitness, and confidence to serve the Lord. Skilled spiritual physicians are required to diagnose and restore erring saints, always acting in a spirit of due humility.²³ Whilst the care and nourishment of the church of God is the prime focus of an overseer, we are each expected to have 'the same care one for another'.²⁴ Thank God for One who did not look on His own things, but whose loving concern brought Him down in the form of a bondservant to where we were! Let's not miss the implications.²⁵

Results and reward

Work is normally undertaken with an expectation of reward or compensation: 'the labourer is worthy of his wages'.²⁶ Astounding as it may seem to sinners saved by grace, the New Testament teaches that Christ will be pleased to review and reward His faithful workers. Not that the reward is restricted to the future. In the providence of God, the earnest and prayerful Christian worker²⁷ may find much to encourage, even here and now: a precious sense of God's presence amidst the pain of labour, 'the Lord working with them and signs following'; and the salvation of souls, and their resultant spiritual progress. 'The husbandman that laboreth must be the first to partake of the fruits'.²⁸

At the same time, the Lord alone has the blood-bought right to review and reward His servants. Using the graphic imagery of fire sweeping through an ancient city to describe the penetrating assessment of Christ at His judgement seat, Paul states: 'each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is'.²⁹ The materials used and the quality of our workmanship will be fully exposed, and the dross consumed. What joy will then be the portion of those whose work survives that ultimate test!³⁰

Endnotes

- 1 Mark. 16. 20; cp. Matt. 28. 20.
- 2 1 Cor. 13. 1-3; Rev. 2. 4-5.
- 3 2 Cor. 5. 14.
- 4 For further reading see helpful papers in: J. HEADING and C. E. HOCKING (Eds.), *Church Doctrine and Practice*, Precious Seed Publications, 1979, pp. 244-299.
- 5 Gen. 1. 31.
- 6 Gen. 2. 15.
- 7 John 5. 17.
- 8 Eph. 2. 10.
- 9 Heb. 11. 10.
- 10 John 9. 4.
- 11 Gk. *sunergos*: Rom. 16. 3, 9, 21; 1 Cor. 3. 9; 2 Cor. 1. 24; 8. 23; Phil. 2. 25; 4. 3; Col. 4. 11; 1 Thess. 3. 2; Philem. 1, 24; 3 John 8.
- 12 Matt. 9. 38.
- 13 1 Cor. 3. 7.
- 14 'Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground, Hos. 10. 12; 'he who plows should plow in hope, and he who threshes in hope should be partaker of his hope', 1 Cor. 9. 10.
- 15 Luke 8. 11; Matt. 13. 38.
- 16 James 5. 7.
- 17 John 4. 35-38 should be carefully considered in this connection.
- 18 2 Cor. 12. 7-10.
- 19 1 Cor. 3. 10.
- 20 2 Tim. 2. 15.
- 21 Luke 10. 35.
- 22 See J. H. LARGE, 'Figures of the church: a hospital', found in J. HEADING and C. E. HOCKING (Eds.) *Church Doctrine and Practice*, Precious Seed Publications, 1979, pp. 75-79.
- 23 Gal. 6. 1. The verb rendered 'restore' is elsewhere used of setting broken limbs and mending nets.
- 24 1 Tim. 3. 5; 1 Cor. 12. 25.
- 25 Phil. 2. 4-11.
- 26 Luke 10. 7.
- 27 Col. 4. 12.
- 28 2 Tim. 2. 6 RV.
- 29 1 Cor. 3. 13.
- 30 1 Cor. 3. 12-15; cp. Rev. 1. 14b.

KEN TOTTON is a member of the *Precious Seed Trust* and is one of its publications editors.

Heart disease remains one of the leading causes of death in the UK, although strides have been made to detect the disease early so that preventative measures can be introduced to monitor those who are at high risk.



Psalm 119 – M

God has much to say about the health of our heart in Psalm 119. David, the man after God's own heart, may be the writer, but the author is definitely God – the breath of divine inspiration is evident in the structure and beauty of this Psalm, with deity mentioned in almost every verse. SPURGEON said, 'It is like the celestial city which lieth four square, and the height and the breadth of it are equal'.

The Psalm may be intimidating because of its sheer length but it is unparalleled in its description of God's word, with 174 out of 176 verses mentioning the word of God. It is easier to study when considered under the acrostic order God has assigned to it. The Psalm consists of twenty-two stanzas each containing eight verses. Each stanza begins with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet and each of the eight verses also starts with this letter. While this may have been an aid to Jews who wanted to memorize it, it is also a vivid reminder of Christ typified by the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet – *Alpha* and *Omega* – for He is, 'the beginning and the end, the first and the last', Rev. 22. 13. The number eight is no accident and its Hebrew meaning of 'fatness' is an appropriate description of both the Psalm and its generous description of God's word.

As Samuel learned, this Psalm teaches us that God looks first upon the heart before the outward appearance,¹ and we will discover that the mighty power of God's word is essential if believers are to avoid 'heart failure'!

The journey for every child of God begins with a change that takes place in the affections of the heart, for it is 'with the heart man believeth unto righteousness', Rom. 10. 10. But the heart that has been justified by faith

needs to develop and be kept free from harm. This is one of the great themes in Psalm 119.

The whole heart

*Aleph*² – Psalm 119. 2

Psalm 119 begins with the same word as Psalm 1, 'Blessed'. God's definition of the man who is truly happy and satisfied is he who walks in the law of God. Verse 2 advances this blessing further, for those who live by God's word are those who seek Him with their *whole heart*. The heart is mentioned fourteen times in the Psalm and is the seat of our affections, so that to seek God with our whole heart will mean undivided affections. A love of God's word will increase our love of Him. This delight in the law of the Lord is contrasted to the 'grease' of the proud heart, v. 70. There is no room for *half-hearted* or *proud-hearted* Christians in the word of God.

The desire of Paul's heart that, 'I may know him'³ indicated a man who had undivided affection for Christ, even when he was a prisoner. May we seek God with our *whole heart*, remembering the sentiment of the Shulamite bride, 'I found him whom my soul loveth: I held him, and would not let him go', S. of S. 3. 4. The outcome will be an absence of sin, v. 3, and the presence of praise.

The upright heart

Aleph – Psalm 119. 7

Praise does not begin with the lips or on the strings of an instrument but originates in the heart. In their extremity, Paul and Silas, 'sang praises unto God', Acts 16. 25. A heart that is not upright will be short of breath when praising God. The word 'upright'

means 'straight or right'. A straight line on a heart monitor is normally a bad sign, but, in Psalm 119, God looks for straight hearts. How can my heart be 'straight' and perform the functions that God intended it to? Only through the word of God, which not only produces an *upright heart* but also a *clean heart*.

A clean heart

*Beth*⁴ – Psalm 119. 11

The first question in the Psalm strongly suggests the introspective words of a young man with a heart sensitive to the defilement of sin. He asks, 'How can a young man cleanse his way?'⁵ By paying attention to God's word! Why is this often so difficult? It is due to neglecting God's word, so that there is no protection when the attack comes. Therefore, I must hide the word of God in my heart, v. 11. This is not hiding to *conceal* but hiding to *find*. Do we hide the word of God 'on' our bookshelf rather than 'in' our hearts? It is good to have the word of God in our hands, and even in our heads, but it must first affect our hearts.

We could easily fill our hearts and minds with news from around the world yet leave no room for the word of God. This is dangerous, as we dare not live without the cleansing power of the word so that we overcome the world even as Christ overcame.⁶ I have a 'verse' in the front of my Bible, 'This book will keep you from sin, and sin will keep you from this book'. Maybe, with David, we need to cry out, 'Create in me a clean heart, O God', Ps. 51. 10.

The enlarged heart

*Daleth*⁷ – Psalm 119. 32

The fourth stanza exposes a man who is depressed and downhearted yet still clinging to the word of God. In verse 28 there is heaviness of heart, but the Psalmist is still able to derive strength from the word. Although he





MONITORING THE HEART

has chosen to walk along the pathway of God's word, he wants his heart to be expanded in its capacity so that he can serve God more effectively. What a contrast! From face down on the ground, v. 25, to running, v. 32! What will increase the spiritual fitness of this man? His heart being enlarged by reading, meditation and obedience to the word. Have we a *big heart* for the word of God? The appetite of many is waning. Have we a big heart for God's assembly? Paul wrote to the saints at Corinth, 'O ye Corinthians, our mouth is open unto you, our heart is enlarged', 2 Cor. 6. 11.

The inclined heart

He – Psalm 119. 36

The believer who is running according to God's word, v. 32, is like Abraham who 'ran' to meet the Lord from the tent door and 'ran' unto the herd, and fetched a calf. His heart was 'inclined' in the right direction. In contrast, Martha was distracted with much serving – her heart inclined toward her service, and not her Saviour. Mary's position sitting at His feet reflects the words of the Psalmist in verse 33, 'Teach me thy statutes'. Our heart can be so easily inclined toward the world, or even be busy in legitimate service, yet distracted from Christ. We must have a teachable spirit so that our hearts are warmed by the Son like the two on the road to Emmaus, who said, 'Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures', Luke 24. 32.

The sound heart

Jod – Psalm 119. 80

3D Heart Ultrasound technology has made imaging of the human heart an excellent diagnostic tool, but Jeremiah tells us that the unseen heart of man is, 'deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?' Jeremiah continues, 'I the Lord search the heart', Jer. 17. 9-10. Knowing the tendency of our hearts toward deceit, we must endeavour to keep our hearts

'sound'. This word can be translated 'sincere' or 'without blemish'. We may sound our heart according to psychology or philosophy, but it is only through the searching eye of God's word upon the heart that we can expect results that will not disappoint. The writer to the Hebrews stresses that the word of God, 'is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart', Heb. 4. 12.

The joyful heart

Nun – Psalm 119. 111

Verse 105 is arguably the most quoted verse from Psalm 119, describing the word as, 'a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path'. The lamp is the source of the light. Aaron enjoyed fellowship with God at the table of showbread under the light from the lampstand. Our fellowship too comes from walking in the light.⁸ In verse 107, the Psalmist has experienced suffering but is determined, whatever the trouble, not to depart from God's precepts. He describes them as an inheritance, v. 111 – something of great value. They are what brings 'joy' to his heart. It is amazing that believers in testing circumstances are able to rejoice in their hearts because the word of God hidden within is a priceless source of joy untouchable by the pain of this world.

The pitch of the heart

Nun – Psalm 119. 112

While the word of God has been a source of joy in the heart, v. 111, it must be obeyed at all times. Some want the joy without obedience. The word 'inclined' can also be translated 'pitched', just as the tabernacle was pitched outside the camp.⁹ What direction have we pitched our heart? Is it pitched toward the sports stadium on a Saturday, or preparing for worship on Lord's day? Our hearts cannot be pitched toward the world and the word at the same time. If we bow to the word of God, we will be in the will of God, for one never contradicts the other.

The prayer of the heart

Koph – Psalm 119. 145

The Psalms record all the emotions of the soul and this stanza records the cry of the psalmist to God and his desire to be heard. His prayer is *whole-hearted*. We learned, in verse 2, the danger of being a *half-hearted* Christian. That will be reflected in a *half-hearted* prayer life. Whole-hearted prayer is what God wants, not vain repetition and long public prayers. May we cry to God with our 'whole heart', as we pray for souls, or as we seek to hear His voice in the study of the scriptures!

The awe of the heart

Schin – Psalm 119. 161

As the Psalm reaches its climax, we have a final look at the state of the heart. The word of God has attracted the Psalmist's heart continually, even when persecution has come from the highest authority in the land. Royal power had offered no protection, but he stands in awe of the word of God. This is not sentimental admiration but a reverential fear that means 'to tremble'. May God cause our hearts to beat faster as we read and meditate upon the word of God and, with David, pray, 'Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting', Ps. 139. 23-24.

Endnotes

- 1 Sam. 16. 7.
- 2 *Aleph* is the first letter in the Hebrew alphabet.
- 3 Phil. 3. 10.
- 4 *Beth* is the second letter in the Hebrew alphabet.
- 5 See also Ps. 51. 7.
- 6 John 16. 33.
- 7 *Daleth* is the third letter in the Hebrew alphabet. [This is the same throughout]
- 8 1 John 1. 7.
- 9 Exod. 33. 7.

JONATHAN BLACK is a member of the *Precious Seed Trust* and has a particular interest in the work of *Faith Matters*.





Whilst the work of *Precious Seed* is not the work of any one man, it is appropriate that in this 70th anniversary magazine we should say a little about the service of those who have been editors of the magazine.

Humphry Lerwill

– Editor from 1945-53

Little is known of Humphry Lerwill. His name appears alongside J. H. Large as joint editor of the magazine from its inception in September 1945 through until the end of 1953 when he resigned from the committee. Following Mr Large's move from Barnstaple to Teignmouth, it was stated that since 'the distance between Teignmouth and Barnstaple will make consultation impracticable, Mr Humphry Lerwill feels that there is no point in his remaining Joint-Editor, and he therefore wishes to resign'.¹

James H. Large

– Editor from 1945-63

Served in the work from September 1945 – July 1968

James Large was born in Cardiff in 1903. Commended to the Lord's work from the assembly in Dinas Powis in May 1933, Mr Large spent many years evangelizing the rural areas of England.

It was in 1940 that Mr and Mrs Large and their son Peter took up residence in Barnstaple, a step that was to prove important for the work of *Precious Seed*. Apart from the significant work of the Lord in North Devon, Mr Large was supportive of those who had been posted to RAF Chivenor during the war years. This involved the provision of hospitality as well as the spiritual care and support of those serving in the forces. Arising from his desire to provide spiritual food for these people, Mr Large started a Bible correspondence course, and, ultimately, this led to a number of brethren from the south-west meeting to discuss the commencement of a magazine. With that background *Precious Seed* was born, and James Large became its first editor, alongside Humphry Lerwill, brief details above. After Mr Lerwill's resignation, he carried the considerable work of editor alone until July 1962. As he left the committee in 1968, he wrote, 'In asking my colleagues to accept my resignation I would like to put on

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record that my fellowship with them from first to last has been very pleasant to me, unmarred, so far as I can recollect, by one single disharmony even when opinions have varied'.²

Charles Gahan wrote of James Large's contribution, 'for seventeen years he was its first Editor; it was during those seventeen years that the success of *Precious Seed* was established'.³

John Heading

– Editor from 1962-85

Served in the work from January 1962 – November 1987

It was Charles Gahan's visit to Sirdar Road assembly in Southampton in early 1961 that brought him into contact with a young John Heading, then lecturing in Mathematics at the university. Aware that James Large wished to relinquish his responsibility as editor, Gahan later wrote to Heading to ask him whether he would be interested in joining the work of the magazine. As Heading later wrote, 'What could I say? I agreed and joined the committee, taking over the editorship immediately, though this was only announced in the July 1962 issue'.⁴

In his time with *Precious Seed*, John Heading worked with Cyril Hocking and then Denis Clapham in editing manuscripts, although, as Heading wrote, it was his responsibility 'to see all the *Precious Seed* Publications through the press, including five large books'.⁵ When he eventually relinquished his role as editor it was to enable him to maintain his significant contribution to the burgeoning work by concentrating 'on the printing side of the magazine production, leaving the manuscript side to brother Clapham'.⁶

Perhaps it is significant that within eighteen months of this change Roy Hill joined the committee, bringing his considerable experience in publishing to this growing aspect of the work.

Cyril Hocking

– Editor from 1963-78

Served in the work from May 1961 – December 1995

Cyril Hocking was born in Cardiff in 1925. Born again in August 1945, he was later commended to the

Lord's work in 1973. But, as Malcolm Horlock wrote, 'for well over half of his Christian life Cyril was also extremely active in the work of the *Precious Seed* committee, being associated with the magazine for about 35 years, many of these in an editorial role'.⁷

He collaborated with John Heading in editing the first of the *Precious Seed* Publications, *Church Doctrine and Practice*, and, again together with John Heading, followed this up in 1977 with *Treasury of Bible Doctrine*, regarded by many as a simple but essential book on biblical doctrines. Apart from his contributions to several of the *Day by Day* series of books, he also edited, or part-edited, three of them in 1979, 1982, and 1994. He also wrote for the book *The Minor Prophets*, providing the 54-page commentary on Zechariah's prophecy.

Working alongside others, Cyril Hocking made a significant contribution to the commencement and development of the book publications aspect of the work of *Precious Seed*.

Denis Clapham

– Editor from 1978-99

Served in the work from March 1969 – November 1999

Denis Clapham was born in Essex, but lived for over sixty years in the Birmingham area. Concerned to contribute to the work of the Lord in his immediate locality, he is best remembered for his faithful and encouraging work amongst the Lord's people in the assemblies at Charlton Road, Kingstanding, and at Hope Chapel in Moseley, before, latterly, at York Street in Leicester.

As John Scarsbrook wrote, 'For . . . thirty years he was closely associated with the work of *Precious Seed*, both as a valuable member of the committee, and, for twelve years, as joint editor. His work saw the continuation and development of the magazine over twenty-eight years. He joined in editorial work for twelve years with Cyril Hocking, John Heading, and Arthur Shearman. During this time also the well received *Day by Day* publications commenced, to encourage the daily reading of scripture'.⁸



itors – 1945 to the Present

Arthur Shearman

– Editor from 2000-02, Reports
Section Editor from 1977-99

Served in the work from March 1966 – May 2006

Born and educated in Gloucester, Arthur left school at fourteen, joined Nicks and Co, a firm that imported and processed timber for the building trade, and stayed with them until retiring at the age of seventy. Also at the age of fourteen, he trusted Christ as his Saviour, was baptized, and received into fellowship in the assembly meeting at Ebenezer Gospel Hall, King's Square, in Gloucester. It was a 'Faith for Life' and he never looked back on his commitment to Christ.

As a result of having to move to Worcester for work, Arthur and Rae joined Charles Street assembly, where they were fully engaged, acting as Sunday school superintendent and secretary for fifty years. Although Arthur always had a very full diary, one of his first loves was the work of Precious Seed Magazine and he served on the trust for forty years. He joined in 1966, becoming Reports Editor in 1977, and also handling past issues requests. Ultimately, he served as Ministry Articles Editor from 2000 to 2002. Under his editorship, the magazine blossomed into the full colour, larger print, version it is today. Arthur was not just a participator but an initiator and encourager of such work, and a powerful influence for good amongst the saints.

Ken Rudge

– Editor from 2001-09, Reports
Section Editor 1998-2001

It was a case of 'in at the deep end'! With the retirement of Dennis Clapham as editor and Arthur Shearman taking up that role, Ken joined the *Precious Seed* committee at a time of significant change and immediately took over the task of editing the Reports section.

As indicated, 1998 saw a number of significant changes. *Precious Seed* became a charitable trust, registered in the UK, and formed an operational structure commensurate with that status. Howard Coles took on the role of secretary and two new members

also joined the committee. It was also at this point that the magazine moved from five issues per year to four. Into that process Ken brought his energy and enthusiasm, eventually working alongside the aging Arthur Shearman before taking over as editor in 2001.

Apart from the move from five issues to four the turn of the century also brought about a move from A5 size to A4 and the full colour illustrated magazine that has become familiar to the present readership. Ken was not only one who embraced change in the presentation of material but he was also instrumental in introducing new aspects of content that continue to feature in the magazine.

The work in Cornwall and, in particular, the building of a new hall in St. Austell led Ken to resign from the Trust in July 2009.

Roy Hill

– General Editor from 2009-14, Trust
Chairman 1998-2014

Served in the work May 1986 – July 2014

After twenty-eight years of service to the work, with sixteen of those years as the chairman of the Trust, Roy Hill retired in 2014.

Along with others listed in this short article, the work of Precious Seed owes a significant amount to the tireless efforts of those who have played key roles. Roy was never one to avoid a challenge and he steered the work through a difficult time of transition when he took over as chairman. Brought to the work because of his considerable experience and expertise in the printing business, he transformed the magazine, whilst at the same time maintaining its adherence to scriptural truth.

It is difficult to summarize the significance of the contribution that Roy made to the work. He was its ambassador, its visionary, and its guide. He developed the presentation of the magazine without diluting its content, increased and streamlined the number of books published, led the work into providing gospel literature in the form of Faith Matters and the calendars,



enabled authors to see their labours in print through Decapolis Press, and, in recent years, led two successful and popular Precious Seed trips to Israel.

Summary

Those that started the work of the magazine in 1945 could not have envisaged the way in which it would develop. The first editors stated, 'We shall aim at presenting sane and balanced exposition of scripture in the assurance that it will commend itself to spiritual men'.⁹ As the work has entered the 21st Century it has sought to remain relevant and practical, yet faithful in its adherence to scriptural truth.

In that same introductory article, it was indicated that 'as time goes on it will become perfectly clear that our policy is positive and constructive – certainly not critical or controversial'.¹⁰ We give thanks to God for maintaining this ministry and we look to Him to provide those who will rise to the enormous challenges that we continue to face. The work commenced with this statement and, as we enter the 71st year, the present committee would echo that desire 'that He will deign to use this unpretentious effort for His glory and the strengthening of Assembly witness in difficult days'.¹¹

Endnotes

- 1 *Precious Seed*, Issue 6 Number 2, January-February 1954, pg. 33.
- 2 *Precious Seed*, Volume 19 Number 4, July- August 1968, pg. 98.
- 3 *Ibid*.
- 4 BRIAN CURRIE (ED.), *My Conversion and Call*, Assembly Testimony Publications, Dunmurry, Belfast, 2009, pg. 154.
- 5 *Ibid*.
- 6 *Precious Seed*, Volume 36 Number 4, July- August 1985, pg. 86.
- 7 *Precious Seed*, Volume 63 Number 2, May 2008, pg. 9.
- 8 *Precious Seed*, Volume 62 Number 2, May 2007, pg. 24.
- 9 *Precious Seed*, Volume 1 Number 1, September 1945, pg. 2.
- 10 *Ibid*.
- 11 *Ibid*.



'AND DWELT AMONG US'

By **A. G. ANSTICE**
Newport, Wales

As the diamond in the hand of the jeweller, by catching various shades of light, reflects new facets of its beauty and brilliance, so the Spirit of God, by taking a word here or a phrase there, unfolds the beauty and glory of the Lord, and, at the same time, teaches us some practical lessons.

Every reader is doubtless familiar with the words of John chapter 1 verse 14. All believers accept with unquestioning faith the mystery and wonder of the incarnation, 'And the Word was made flesh', for this lies at the very heart of their sure and certain hope.

It was, therefore, with something of renewed wonder that the writer recently thought upon the words 'and dwelt among us'. Here is a fact that is astounding and wonderful when we consider of whom it was written. God in Christ has come to men. He has not only come but has 'dwelt' among them! The words of Proverbs chapter 8 verse 31, 'And my delights were with the sons of men', have found their fulfilment in 'Immanuel' – God with us. We had Him here among men, sharing the life they live, and entering into the experiences common to them, sin apart; for He was 'holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners', Heb. 7. 26. The humanity of the Lord Jesus was very real, He 'was found in fashion as a man', Phil. 2. 8. The truth concerning the deity and humanity of the Lord Jesus is so profound that we cannot fully understand, still less explain it, but faith unhesitatingly accepts the statements of the word of God concerning the Son of God, the Lord from heaven, and sings:

'Where reason fails,
with all her powers,
There faith prevails,
and love adores',
[ISAAC WATTS].

And dwelt among us

But for this, Hebrews chapter 2 verses 17 and 18, and chapter 4 verses 15 and 16 would never have been written. 'Wherefore in all things it

behaved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted'.

Is it weariness? Linger awhile at Sychar's Well and ponder the wondrous grace of Him who rested there 'being wearied with his journey', John 4. 6.

Is it hunger? 'He afterward hungered', Luke 4. 2; yet He was always ready to satisfy the hunger of others, both physically and spiritually.



Is it sorrow? Who ever touched the depths of sorrow as He did? He was indeed the 'man of sorrows and acquainted with grief'. No wonder He, only, can truly heal the broken heart.

Yes! In all things He touches us, and, because He has dwelt among us, knows how to minister that grace and help we so much need, for He is 'touched with the feeling of our infirmities', Heb 4. 15. What matchless compassion and comfort are revealed in the High Priestly ministry of the Lord Jesus.

A little while ago a Christian friend said something like this to me. 'I go along . . . Street about five to eleven Lord's day mornings. No

doubt people in the street who see me pass by – usually in the car – know that I go to the Gospel Hall, but does it mean anything to them? Does it touch them in any way?' Thinking over this, I wonder whether much of the apathy and indifference shown by many is explained, at least partially, by the fact that in many cases our 'tents' are so far from the 'tabernacle' that we are out of touch with the lives and problems of the people we seek to reach. One of the valuable features of missionary work, particularly in the case of married missionaries, is that they are able to set up a Christian home among the people they seek to serve. When the late Mr. R. C. Chapman was led to take up residence in Barnstaple, he took a cottage in a side street so that he might dwell among the people he was to care for spiritually. But whether near at hand or otherwise, may our lives be such that people shall know by our understanding and sympathy how much we really do care for their spiritual and material welfare. May the Lord so indwell our hearts that we shall bring to others an awareness of His presence! How essential, also, for the shepherd to be among the flock he seeks to guide and feed!

In the midst of them

Is there today any community of Christians who may claim this statement of the Lord? We believe there is! The Hebrew reader of chapter 13 verse 13 would readily understand and appreciate the words 'without the camp'. The Lord Jesus is still in the 'outside place' and there is still a 'reproach' to bear. And whoever they are and wherever they are found, He is in the midst of all who own His lordly name, and worship Him in spirit and in truth. The crux of the matter surely is not whether we should be more 'open' or 'closed', but whether we know where He is, and are found in that place with all who look for, and love His appearing. And let us remember that it is His word that will be our sure guide in this matter.

ALFRED GEORGE ANSTICE joined the Precious Seed Trust as co-treasurer from March 1948. He served in that capacity until his sudden death in May 1962 at the age of 73.



The Will Of God

By **ALBERT ROUSE** Bristol, England

John's third Epistle shows how division in the church arose even in the days of the Apostle John. The root cause of such division in our own day, as also then, is the activity of un-judged self.

But it also demonstrates the formation of a new company, designated by the word 'them'. 'I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the pre-eminence among them, receiveth us not', v. 9. Here we have a particular church emerging from common church ground, and occupying a new and altogether unique position. A company is formed, claiming to be 'the Assembly of God', yet disclaiming all saints who are not of their fellowship.

A clear distinction was made, in John's first Epistle, between 'the children of God' and 'the children of the devil'; on one side were those who were 'of God', and on the other, 'the whole world lying in the wicked one'; but here a third company rises up, not out of the world, but out of the church, who deliberately separate themselves from those who are 'of God', and glory in doing so. An inner circle is formed, having a particular basis of communion, more limited and narrow than the apostles of Christ made known as conveying the thoughts of God.

John proceeds to account for this strange departure from the truth, and we are thankful to get at the real root of the mischief at a stroke. 'But Diotrephes, who loveth to have the pre-eminence among them, receiveth us not'. Ah! Here it is – Diotrephes loveth pre-eminence – the leprosy in the head!

We cannot say who now represents Diotrephes. Doubtless his name is legion, but 'by their fruits ye shall know them', Matt. 7. 20. Wherever there is a manifest tendency to self-assertion in the assembly, to rule the saints, to sit on the judgement-seat, there Diotrephes is to be discovered.

Without doubt he was a man of ability, with perhaps apparent spirituality, or he would not have secured a following in the church. Yet, 'self' was the object he was serving, not our Lord Jesus Christ but his own belly. In this way self becomes the real object of that which is done professedly for Christ and His people, and soon everything in the assembly is ruled according to its relation to selfish interest, under colour of outward separation from evil, zeal for the truth, standing for the honour of Christ, guarding the sanctity of His assembly, and many other kindred objects of a highly spiritual appearance.

Happily for us, the Spirit of God has anticipated this state of things, and provided for us a divine solution of the whole case, putting into our hands an able test wherewith to 'try the spirits' by pointing out the real root of the evil – Diotrephes 'loveth to have the pre-eminence among them'. This is where the difficulty begins in almost every case where strife and division are found among saints. Christ will not share the affections. He will either gain the heart's whole interest, or the love of other things will enter in and gain the ascendancy, nay, the supremacy.

When once this terrible object, self, has been enthroned, there is no lack of complaints against the brethren. The very best of them, viewed from such a standpoint, will soon have glaring deficiencies; for whilst love, according to God, will cover a multitude of sins, love, according to self, will uncover them, so that none can escape unless they bring themselves under the ruling spirit of the faultfinder, no, not even John 'the elder'!

If we have seen the formation of this new company, it will be well to look at some of its leading characteristics, as described in verses 9 and 10. Notice the first thing in verse 9: 'the church'. And the last thing in verse 10 is 'the church'. This is a company strongly entrenched on so-called 'church' ground. This is their impregnable fortress.

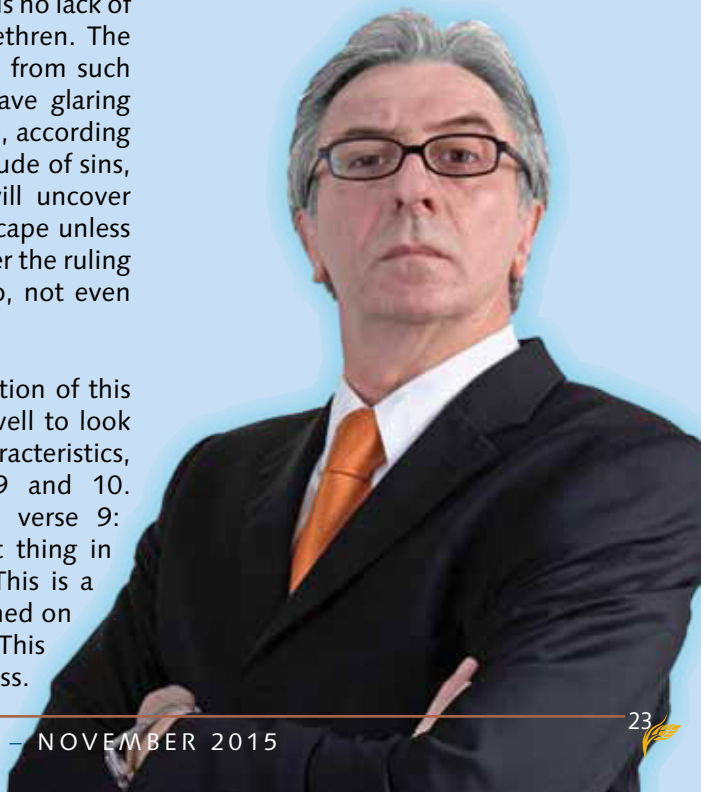
It is not simply an assembly, but the assembly of Christ, the only company of saints which can claim His presence in the midst.

But how all this fair show is shorn of its strength and dignity the moment that John unveils the facts of the case! They are then seen gathered together not in the name of the Lord, but unto the person of Diotrephes. Yes, gathered to a man who is pre-eminent among them!

It is instructive to see the attitude John takes up in relation to this restricted circle of fellowship. He does not propose to discuss the new position occupied, for he well knew it was not after 'the old commandment'. Nor does he threaten to excommunicate Diotrephes, or cut off this troublesome assembly. He will not use his apostolic authority, but, he says, referring to Diotrephes, 'I will call to remembrance his deeds which he doeth'. He will seek to convict him of his wrong and, if possible, to convert him, cp., Jas. 5. 19, 20.

We are thankful that we never read of a John party, or a Gaius party, or a Demetrius party. So far as we know, these godly ones never drew away disciples after them. May we ever have grace to say, 'Peace be to the brethren, and love . . . grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity'.

First published in 1954, a fuller version of this article can be found at: http://www.precious-seed.org/article_detail.cfm?articleID=1657.





John wrote his Gospel so that his readers might learn how to obtain eternal life, 20. 31, and he wrote his first epistle that those who believed they had obtained it might be able to verify the fact, 5. 13. Verbal profession without having the root of the matter within is easy and all too common. Three times John says in his first chapter 'If a man say' and three times in his second chapter he says 'He that saith', because John is not satisfied with words alone, he expects them to be accompanied by proofs that what is said is really true.

Seven times John uses the word *gennao* in his first epistle. It means 'to beget' and denotes the impartation by God to a believer of His own nature, thus constituting him one of His children. He uses the perfect tense which implies a past event, the effects of which are abiding and permanent. Thus, wrapped up in the very word and tense is the fact of eternal security. Once divine life has been received it cannot be lost; none can be turned out of the family of God once they are in. But what external proofs are there? John tells us what to look for.

Confessed faith in the person of Christ

'Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God', 5. 1. Mark well that word 'believeth'. Do I here and now admit that the Lord Jesus is all that He claimed to be, and am I prepared to make verbal confession of that fact to others? Note the verb is 'is'; he does not say 'was' for the confession relates not only to the past earthly life of the Son of God but to His present heavenly session also. No-one who denies the deity of Christ has eternal life. This must head the list of evidences, for it is basic.

If, then, the reader of this paper is in any doubt as to whether he has been born again let him ask himself what is his present attitude towards Christ. If his answer is 'I do believe' he may well advance to further tests in order to gain the added assurance that John wishes his readers to have.

Evidences of New Birth



Righteousness of conduct

'If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that everyone that doeth righteousness is born of him', 2. 29.¹ Thus John gives both sides of the matter for he knows no neutral ground. He owns no grey; he only knows black or white. We are either born again or we are not; we are either alive or dead.

Human fathers beget sons in their own likeness and in their own image as did Adam. It follows, then, that the children of God are born after the image of Him that begat them. No wonder then the sons of God should walk as the Son of God walked. Note the tense again which John uses. He is most particular and says 'doeth', denoting the characteristic of the life. The one who is born of God habitually practises righteousness, not occasionally. His lapses are occasional things; the norm of his life is righteousness.

But what is righteousness? It has been defined as 'consistency of action with any given relationship', which means that if, for example, I am a husband I shall do all that is required of me by God to be as such. So will all the children of God whatever may be their relationship, whether husband, wife, parent, child, master, servant or aught else. Each relationship, God-ward or man-ward, whether spiritual, natural or social carries with it moral duties and the proper discharge of these is 'righteousness'. It goes far beyond mere honesty in business, though that, of course, is obviously included. Therefore, in addition to having assurance because of the objective statements in God's word to which we pin our faith (they are

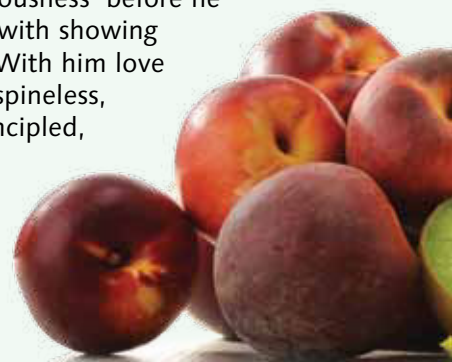
outside of ourselves), we should also apply this subjective test and see how we stand by considering what has been wrought within us and how it is displaying itself. Let us ask, how are we discharging our obligations in the setting of life in which God has placed us? No child of God need

despair because of a measure of failure: provision has already been made for such in the advocacy of the Lord Jesus.

Love to the brethren

'Everyone that loveth is born of God', 4. 7.² In a proper family the children, who of course love the parents, will also love the new arrival; it is natural, normal, and just what one would expect. Love pervades the whole circle. It was so in the early days of the Christian era, when people used to say 'See how these Christians love one another'. We need not despair, even in these days of sad divisions, because there is still a very large amount of love existent among the people of God, a love that over-rides all ecclesiastical and other barriers. In so acting we display the nature of God as well as prove the genuineness of our profession.

It is suggestive that we are told that 'God is light' before 'God is love', and that John speaks of 'doing righteousness' before he deals with showing love. With him love is no spineless, unprincipled,





sentimental kind of thing that has no regard for the claims of God and others. Love is always obedient to the commandments of God, 5. 2, and thus helps others into a similar path. It does not exercise itself at the expense of righteousness. There is an adage that says 'Love is blind', yet in matter of fact it is hatred which is blind. Love has sight but the one who hates another can never tell where it will lead, 1 John 2. 11.

Here then is a salutary test which we may apply to ourselves. How do I regard the children of God, especially those who do not see eye to eye with me? What of those who irritate me? It is one of the surest signs of new birth when we are instinctively drawn toward fellow-Christians, simply because they belong to Christ.

Freedom from habitual sin
'Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin: for his seed remaineth in him, and he cannot sin because he is born of God. In this the children of God are manifest and the children of the devil', 3. 9, 10.³ Clearly John does not imply 'sinless perfection' by these statements, for he has envisaged the possibility of a believer sinning and spoken of the provision already made for it in the advocacy of Christ, 2. 1. But, as always, the tenses are important. He uses the present continuous tense and means that the one born of God does not, and cannot, as a matter of habit, go on sinning. He has within the very seed of God, i.e., the divine nature, a nature which, like everything else, can only produce after its own kind. The impossibility here spoken of is one of the nature of things, a moral impossibility. The needle of the

compass cannot but point to the north, though under some strain it may be diverted. In like manner, it is morally impossible for a believer to 'continue in sin'. This very point was raised by Paul and dealt with, Rom. 6. The basis of his contention is that the believer has died to sin. This same matter is dealt with by John though the basis of his argument is that the believer is alive – he has been born of God.

Thus, the subjective test now to be applied is, what kind of life am I living? Am I continuing in sin, utterly insensitive to its unsuitability to the life which I ever I possess? 'He that was begotten of God', that is the Lord Jesus, 'keepeth him' so that we are without excuse. He, as 'begotten of God', was not merely able not to sin, but was unable to sin, and the very nature which He possessed, 'that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us', He has communicated to us. He that hath the Son hath life, and this life is in His Son. We do not have it independently of Him for He is the great reservoir from whom it flows.

Victory over the world
'Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world', 5. 4. This is not the world of sinners, nor the world of nature, the former of which we are to love and the latter we may enjoy. But 'the world' is that system which Satan has led man, exiled from the garden of Eden, to build up in order to counteract the effects of the fall. It is that which man arranges in order 'to make the best of a bad job'. In such a system the child of God cannot expect to avoid tribulation, though he can draw comfort from the fact that the Lord Jesus has overcome it. Therefore, he

should not be overcome by it. 'The world' would seek to prevent our obeying the commandments of God, 5. 3, but the believer possesses a nature which overcomes it and a principle which enables him to obey God. 'The world' regards the commandments of God as restrictive, depressing, and unreasonable and fails to understand anyone who gladly obeys them. But the believer has no such difficulties. To him the commandments of God are not grievous and he is happy to obey, leaving the issues with God. For this reason the world cannot understand us, and regards us as odd. But we need not be troubled; we are in the best of company.

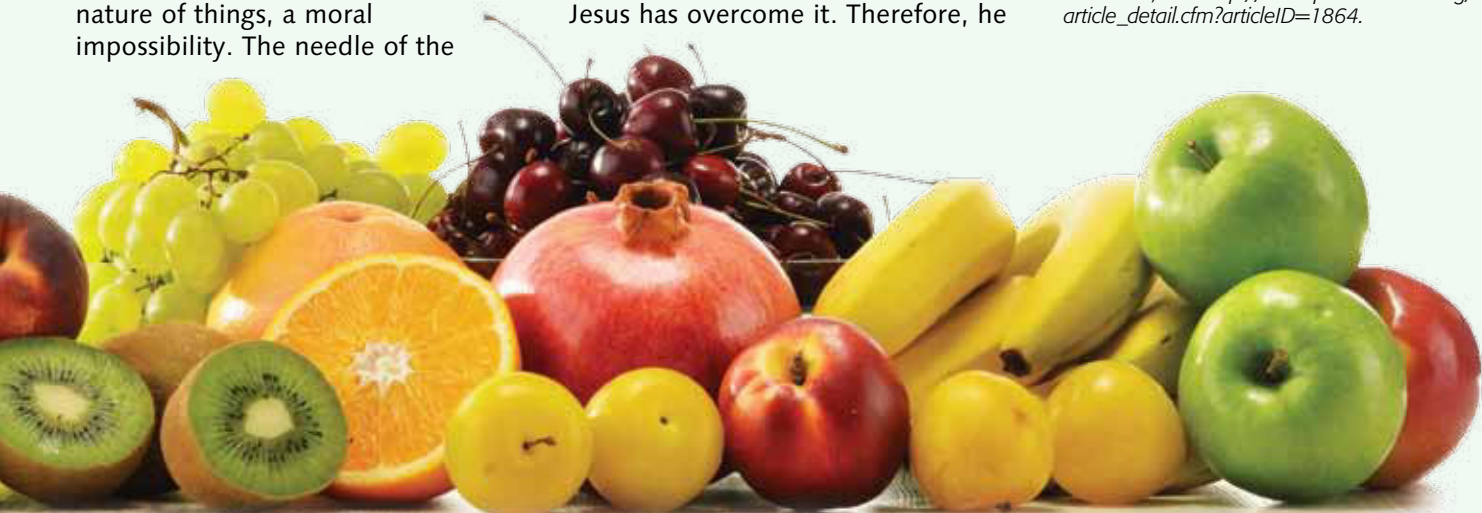
All truly born again persons are ultimately 'overcomers' and will have their rewards commensurate with their faithfulness and diligence. But, in so saying, we must beware lest we be like Gad and 'troops overcome us' from time to time, even though in the last instance we be victorious, Gen. 49. 19. It is better to overcome all along the line.

Apply, then, these tests in the presence of God and, while you may expect to be humbled and searched, you will learn your Father's heart and your Saviour's work in such a way that you will never doubt Him though you may have doubted yourself.

Endnotes

- 1 See also 1 John 3. 7, 10.
- 2 See also 3. 14; 5. 1.
- 3 See also 5. 18.

First published in 1958, for a fuller version of this article, see: http://www.preciousseed.org/article_detail.cfm?articleID=1864.





REPORTS REPORTS REPORTS

GOSPEL WORK AND OTHER ACTIVITIES Compiled by SANDY JACK



ENGLAND

Berkshire

At the end of April, Daniel Rudge, together with the saints at **Bracknell**, held a series of gospel meetings. Fifty unsaved, twenty of which were adults, came along to a family lunch on the first Sunday. The children listened well to a Bible story while the gospel was preached to the adults. It seemed to be an effective introduction to the subsequent meetings which ran from Monday to Thursday. During these, nine different unsaved people attended the afternoon and evening sessions, where some fundamental questions, such as, 'Does God exist?' and 'Can I trust the Bible?', were considered.

Daniel is also engaged in weekly tract distribution around the Bracknell area. 40,000 Seed Sowers have been given out.



West Midlands

The assembly at Upper Hill Street Gospel Hall, **Coventry**, are most grateful to the Lord for blessing and answered prayer in respect to the Bible Exhibition and two weeks' gospel effort held there. The local saints have been much encouraged in the work and especially give thanks to God for the profession of faith of a 24-year-old man.

The Bible Exhibition: (c/o the Hildenborough Gospel Hall Trust, Kent, UK) continued from Monday, 29th June, through to Friday, 10th July, from 9:30am to 6pm, except

Sundays. It was staffed by evangelist Bobbie Eadie and his wife Ruby, with support from local saints. A total of 404 people signed the Visitor's Book, including sixty school-children and four teachers. Only eight of the 404 were known to be from local assemblies. The attendee range of nationalities, creeds, religions, and characters was simply vast – thank God for the gospel of the 'whosoever'!

The exhibition provided an excellent gospel resource: an overview from Genesis to Revelation with supporting artefacts and exhibits, providing ample opportunity to present Christ and the message of the gospel. More details of the content can be found at www.the-bible-exhibition.co.uk.

The Gospel Hall is located on a pedestrian thoroughfare close to the city centre. The majority of visitors came in as a result of personal invitations from the saints, as they gave out exhibition and gospel meeting invitation flyers outside the Hall. A total of 650 leaflets were distributed in this manner, plus 4,650 leaflets in advance in several local housing estates.

The assembly would also like to thank the Hildenborough Assembly, who, as custodians of the exhibition, gave of their own time to deliver, erect, disassemble and collect, as well as maintain the exhibition, and the Cardiff brethren who compiled the exhibition in past years.

Gospel Meetings: These were

conducted by Bobby Eadie, with the help of some local brethren, from Sunday, 28th June, through to Sunday, 12th July, except Saturdays. Twenty-five visitors attended the gospel meeting over the eleven nights, including twenty-one new people who had been contacted through the Bible exhibition. After five attendances, a young man volunteered a clear profession of faith in Christ, based on the messages received, and, latterly, his consideration of John chapter 3 verses 16 and 36. He had no prior contact with the gospel, but has immediately attached himself to the saints, and is showing evidence of conversion. Please pray for his spiritual growth. He needs keeping 'by the power of God', 1 Peter 1. 5.

Rugby World Cup Outreach

During the months of September and October a number of venues in England and Wales have hosted matches as part of the 2015 Rugby World Cup. Exercised by this opportunity for evangelism, Andrew Bennett (Kirkby) and Stephen Buckeridge (Datchet) co-ordinated the printing and distribution of 164,000 tracts to be given to those attending the various matches.

Initially, the desire was to involve as many young believers as possible. Hence, in the writing of the tract, the design of the tract, and the design and development of the accompanying website, a number of younger believers were involved. As the matches involved teams from





across the world, the tract contained a message in English and French, or English and Welsh, with John 3 verse 16 in English, Welsh, French, Italian, and Spanish on the back. The help of those fluent in the relevant languages was appreciated.

As well as the production of the tract, a specific website was created for the outreach, and that was featured on the back of the tract as a web address or a QR code. Stephen Baker (Liverpool) kindly provided a video gospel message specific to the event, which can be watched on the site.

The matches in Twickenham, Wembley, and the Olympic Stadium, London, together with those in Cardiff, Leeds, Leicester, Manchester, Milton Keynes, and Newcastle formed the main focus of the work, but with believers elsewhere also using the tract in their area. Some

assemblies are using the local matches to hold gospel meetings in their halls. However, those who receive the tract were pointed to the website, www.ultimateconversion.co.uk, as a means of follow-up to the initial message.

The interest amongst the Lord's people in supporting this outreach was most encouraging and prayer would be valued that the seed sown might be blessed.



For two weeks in July, the Northfield tent meetings, which have been running since 1987, were held. The first week comprises ministry in the

morning and gospel in the evening, with the gospel meetings continuing for the second week. At the same time, meetings are held for children and take place on a caravan park nearby. Each morning around 500-700 attended the ministry meetings and up to 1,200 attended the evening gospel meetings. The attendees comprised local people and many from throughout N. Ireland, supplemented by regular visitors from Eire, England, Scotland and Wales. The Lord has richly blessed the meetings over the years and many souls have been saved and saints taught and encouraged. The speakers were Alan Parkes in the gospel, Paul Young in the ministry, and Colin Sheldon in the children's work. The Lord moved in the salvation of quite a number of people. The conveners from the Newcastle and Ballywillwill assemblies welcome visitors all year, but especially at these special meetings.



Argentina

A three-day retreat in Jujuy, Argentina's most northerly province, was attended by ninety elders and their wives from thirty assemblies. Meetings began at 9 am and carried on throughout the day until 10 pm. Over the three days there were ten sessions on assembly principles and practice, which Jim Burnett shared with a German missionary brother.

In February this year, a national worker, along with his wife and family, took up residence in Bella Vista in the Province of Corrientes, where there is no assembly. From 20-26th July a group of young people, with the commendation of their respective assemblies, spent their winter holidays there, assisting in an evangelistic effort. The whole town was visited with literature and invitations. They also had outreach activities for young teens and children. Some help with foodstuffs was given to the most vulnerable. A doctor on the team did medical tests. Another brother, an eye specialist, checked over 200 people for eye health; in some cases he prescribed spectacles.

The prescriptions are being sent to a 'Bank' in Buenos Aires and they will try to match and send help to these people. The evangelistic effort culminated in a meeting held on the last Saturday evening in a sports hall. They were delighted that the town Provost accepted an invitation to come. Corrientes is the province with the least assembly witness in all Argentina. Please pray for the work and workers there and also for the seed sown last week.

Brazil

Alexandre, Serginho, and John Axford recently visited isolated believers located in the central inland wilderness

area of the north east state of Ceará. The climate there is rough, dry and desert like – hot during the day and cold at night. The local culture is lawless and dangerous. Motorbikes flourish. Youngsters drive without a licence. Crash helmets are almost non-existent. Police were out of sight.

The gospel reached Ramadinha through Francisco, who had travelled south in search of work. While working in the sugar cane fields near Leme, Sao Paulo, he heard the gospel, which, with a Bible, he took back to Ramadinha. Soon after his return, he trusted the Lord, as did his mother, wife, and sister. Francisco is a keen





evangelist, makes friends easily, and several men from nearby farms also came to know the Lord. These all now gather simply to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. The assembly functions regularly, meeting in a small hall on the side of Francisco's mother's home.

During the visit, meetings were held every night and with profitable conversations during the mornings in the home. The brethren had many questions on doctrine, which required biblical answers. Evangelistic visits were made during the afternoons in two nearby towns, Pedra Branca and Nova Independência, to contacts that Francisco had previously made. Many children were also contacted, both on the streets and in various homes. Alexander had prepared the first set of Postal Bible School papers. They also had great pleasure in taking the gospel to an isolated community in the farming hills. As the track leading there was not suitable for a car, they travelled on motorbikes. Whole families gathered to hear the word of God read and the gospel preached. Some returned for the meeting in the evening. The hall was full and several men openly declared themselves to be close to salvation. Please pray that they will trust the Lord without delay.

India

Charles Davidson, from Northern Ireland, conducted gospel meetings in **Gangtok**. On the first night the hall was packed to capacity and the believers who were initially seated in the hall moved out to the adjoining anterooms. In the audience there were three Christian girls, college mates of a new believer, Sagarika, who stays with Jiwan and Rachel. One of the girls thanked Sagarika for inviting them. She was confused before the meeting but that night she was assured of her salvation. 'I had never understood it that way before', she said.



On the second night, a girl called Pushpa was saved. Pushpa comes from a Hindu family from Nepal. Her sister Manju, who had cancer, is a believer from Gangtok. She had been hearing the gospel for two years and came to Gangtok at Manju's invitation. She came with a load of tension about her family, who have no interest in the gospel whatsoever. She did know the truth but felt that family was more important than the gospel. On the first night, her mind changed. She felt troubled and torn. And on the second night, she left all her thoughts about her family to God and trusted the Saviour. 'It is only after I get saved that I can tell them about God and the gospel', she thought to herself. It was just between God and her. She knew that the Lord Jesus died for her, and simply put her faith in Him. 'Now I trust and pray that my husband will believe in the gospel', she said. She is now the third sister among four to have trusted the Lord. Of her two brothers, one, Bikram, also trusted the Lord a few years ago. Their parents are very disappointed about such developments in their family. Manju has reported that she was singing away till late in the night and has started reading her Bible.

Sujata, a dentist who was saved in February, is doing well. She is setting up her own clinic, which is under construction. She has decided to employ two assembly girls in her clinic. It means a lot of extra effort as she has to train them as technicians. She is ready to do that for the love of the Lord. It will be a huge financial help for these two girls, who desperately needed jobs.

Sujata's brother, Pravash has been coming to the meetings. He has a lot of strange questions and says that he will not become a Christian just because people tell him to. He says, 'I want God Himself to tell me to become one'.

Romania

The assembly in **Giurgiu** rented the Art Gallery in an excellent position in the town for two days in April. During the two days, over 350 people attended, of which at least 95% were unbelievers. The first day in particular, there were good numbers of young people. A lot of gospel literature

and John's Gospels were distributed. In the city of Iasi a Bible Exhibition was set up in a Gospel Hall, and four very profitable days were spent with a Christian school with 420 pupils. It was also used in a large shopping mall for three days, and forty-five believers from five assemblies were a great help. Over 1,500 people visited the exhibition, including students from North African countries studying in Iasi. Many contacts were made and young believers were greatly encouraged.

Gospel tent work commenced in April near the capital, Bucharest, in the village of Draganeasca and, despite some poor weather, fifty-five children attended the afternoon tent meeting and, during the weekend, over twenty unsaved adults heard the gospel preached clearly. Prayer is valued for the small assembly in Draganeasca and the ongoing work of the gospel.

In the County of Alba, meetings were held with Paul Williams as follows:

- eight nights of Bible studies in the fairly new assembly at Rachita,
- two meetings with the Spring assembly,
- a youth conference in Salistea that was very well attended, with excellent interest in the word of God,
- the opportunity to preach at baptisms in Călnic assembly.

At Călnic, nine believers were baptized, including five young people from Călnic, a believer from Miercurea Sibiului, and three believers from Dobârca. These three believers from Dobârca all heard the gospel for the first time in tent meetings during the last two summers, one of whom was saved last August.



Ceară clock tower



A WORD FOR TODAY

Semer (Dregs; aged wine)

S(h)emesh (Sun)

Senhabbim (Tooth, ivory)

Shakespeare's tragedy Richard III opens with these famous lines, 'Now is the winter of our discontent, made glorious summer by this sun of York'. This forms part of a longer soliloquy, where the Duke of Gloucester (later Richard III), acknowledges that the misfortunes of the House of York are now over, since his brother has been crowned Edward IV. There is a play on the word 'sun', as Edward IV, a son of the Duke of York, is also viewed like the 'blazing sun', the image adopted by him on his heraldic badge. And this sort of play on words is evident when we explore the use of the Hebrew word for 'sun' (*shemesh*), which occurs more than 100 times in the Old Testament.

The word *shemesh* is literally used of the 'sun' as a created heavenly body moving within the 'theatre of God's glory', CALVIN, Pss 50. 1; 104. 19. It is the source of light for the earth by day, Gen. 1. 16, and when the 'sun' rises, human beings go out to work, but lions retire to rest, Ps. 104. 22-23! The heavens are described as a tent where the sun rests when set, but then bursts forth to expose and penetrate the darkness as it runs its dynamic course across the sky, 19. 4-5. 'The day is its victory lap; the night is its sabbath'.¹ WHYBRAY suggests that in Psalm 19 there is a close connection between the illumination and radiance of the life-giving sun and the divine law that enlightens the eyes and illuminates the servant of God.² Job's response to Bildad's first address indicates the futility of trying to contend with God without an arbiter. How could he possibly take on God who regulated the movements of the sun, and could even command it not to rise, Job. 9. 7a? Other general references to the sun, or to the 'sunrise' or 'sunset', are found in Genesis chapter 15 verse 12, where, at sunset, Abram falls into a deep sleep prior to God revealing the future to him. In Exodus chapter 16 verse 21 the importance of gathering manna in the morning is highlighted, because the later heat of the sun would melt it. To help Jonah understand His sovereign grace towards Nineveh, God uses the elements, especially the heat of the sun, to bring him into a state of weakness, Jonah 4. 8. It is *shemesh* that describes the sun that Joshua commands to stand still in mid-heaven, Josh. 10. 12. And it is under this same

By **BRIAN CLATWORTHY**
Newton Abbot, England

sun that the writer of Ecclesiastes takes a view on the utter futility of earthly life, Eccles. 1. 3. Living 'under the sun', i.e., life without revering God and observing His commandments, 12. 13, is viewed as a sheer waste of time and effort that is ultimately expressed by existential despair, 12. 8.

According to CHISHOLM, 'the worship of the sun was widespread in the ancient Near East and was deeply rooted in Canaan'.³ This form of worship was, however, proscribed for Israel, because of its intrinsic link with idolatry, Deut. 4. 19; 17. 3. Nonetheless, it was still practised, even in the temple, hence Josiah's suppression of the idolatrous priests whom successive kings of Judah had appointed to burn incense to the sun and moon and constellations and all the host of the heavens, 2 Kgs. 23. 5; cp. Ezek. 8. 16.⁴

The word *shemesh* becomes a metaphor for God Himself in Psalm 84 verse 11, suggesting that He is the source of grace and favour, cp. Ps. 27. 1. In the same way that the sun gives light and revelation, so God provides illumination and healing in His word, 19. 7. The sun is also a symbol of reliability, 72. 5, 17; 89. 36, and an apt analogy of God's word that is always constant. It is the darkened sun (*shemesh*) that will form part of the prelude 'before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes', Joel. 2. 31 ESV. But perhaps the most unique metaphorical use of the word *shemesh* is in the last prophetic utterance of the Old Testament, where we find the effulgent image of the 'sun of righteousness' being presented to us, Mal. 4. 2a. Most scholars think that the phrase is probably a solar epithet for either God or a Christological title. Significantly, if it is Christological, which we think it is, then it is a play on the word 'sun', and reflects the fact that not only has God delivered all judgement to the Son, John 5. 20, but it is only through the rising of the sun (Son) that mankind can be healed spiritually, Rom. 4. 24-25. Both the sun/Son are essential to preserving/saving life, Eccles 11. 7 ESV; John 10. 10, 28.

In the Septuagint (LXX) *shemesh* is most commonly translated by the Greek noun for 'sun' - *helios*, which is then used extensively throughout the New Testament. Just as *shemesh* was used literally and metaphorically

so is *helios* as the various contexts direct. It is used of sunrise and sunset, Mark 16. 2; 1. 32. On the Mount of Transfiguration our Lord's face shone like the sun, reflecting His intrinsic glory, Matt. 17. 2.⁵ This is the glory that, like the sun, shines in its strength or power, Rev. 1. 16 – undoubtedly a text that draws down heavily on Old Testament imagery from Judges chapter 5 verse 31 and Daniel chapter 10, cp. also Rev. 10. 1. Paul goes that bit further when he refers, at his conversion, to the light from heaven that even eclipsed the sun, Acts 26. 13. It is the effect of the scorching heat from the sun that withers the flower of the grass, thus reflecting the transient nature of life, especially for those who put their trust in riches, Jas. 1. 11. One aspect of the future kingdom of God is that the righteous will shine like the sun, Matt. 13. 43. As RENN observes when reviewing the use of the word 'sun' as the sign of impending cosmic dissolution, 'The Old Testament references are cast in the contexts of apocalyptic-style prophecy in relation to the final day of the Lord judgment. And in the New Testament, Jesus refers to this same phenomenon as one of the distinctive features that will herald the end of the universe prior to the final judgment'.⁶ Ultimately, then, the sun will no longer be required as 'there will no longer be night', Rev. 21. 25, but the present need for us to witness to the Son's work remains unabated. May we be so lit up by the Son that people will turn to Him in repentance and faith to find eternal life, Matt. 5. 16; John 3. 36.

For further reading/study

Introductory

LELAND RYKEN, JAMES C WILHOIT, TREMPER LONGMAN III (Eds) *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* - 'Sun', pg. 827.

Advanced

WILLIAM P. BROWN, *Seeing the Psalms – A Theology of Metaphor* – 'The Sun of Righteousness: Psalm 19 and the Joy of Lex', pp. 81-103.

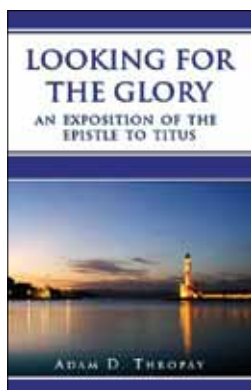
Endnotes

- 1 WILLIAM P. BROWN, *Seeing the Psalms – A Theology of Metaphor*, pg. 84.
- 2 *Reading the Psalms As A Book*, pg. 45.
- 3 ROBERT B. CHISHOLM JR *Handbook on the Prophets*, pg. 240.
- 4 Notice also in 2 Kings chapter 23 verses 11 and 12 that even horses and chariots were dedicated to the sun. TSUMURA states that the Mesopotamian sun god Samas was called a 'chariot-rider', NIDOTTE, pg. 187.
- 5 Contrast this with Moses who simply reflected God's glory, 2 Cor. 3. 7.
- 6 *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words*, pg. 945.

Book Reviews

Compiled by 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



Looking for the Glory – An Exposition of the Epistle to Titus

Adam D. Thropay

Paperback, 103 pages, Published by Scripture Teaching Library, Cookstown, Northern Ireland.
ISBN 978-1-909789-22-7.

ADAM D. THROPAY has been involved in Bible teaching in assemblies in North America for many years, and readers of this and other magazines will probably have benefited from his written ministry already. His other writings include *Local Church Essentials*.

His aim in this book, as in some of his other writings, is to assist readers who are not so familiar with the original languages of the scriptures to understand the meaning of each English phrase in the King James Version. He seeks to fulfil this aim by citing the Greek or Hebrew words beside each phrase, and then explaining those words to give a fuller grasp of the passage being analyzed.

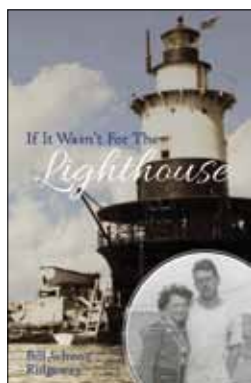
His comments on individual words can be lengthy at times. They give not only an exposition

of the doctrine of the verse in question, but also practical application for us today and references to other relevant scriptures. The result is an in-depth study of the book being so treated.

The author has used this method of exposition to good effect in this small volume on Paul's Epistle to Titus, which is remarkable for the wealth of teaching that it packs into just forty-six verses. Titus emphasizes the practice of the truth of the gospel more forcibly than almost any other letter in the New Testament. It contains practical instruction for believers from every age group and social class, including local assembly elders. It also includes profound doctrinal statements concerning the glorious appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, and links our present responsibilities to God's eternal purposes for His own. The reviewer wonders if Thropay's method of exposition would be as much appreciated for a much longer section of scripture, since minute details in the text could obscure the overall thought-flow of such a book. However, for a short book like Titus, it works very well.

This paperback is well-produced by the Scripture Teaching Library, with an attractive cover and typeface. It is a worthwhile purchase for any Bible student, whether younger or older.

Thanks to Malcolm Davis, Leeds, England for this review.



If it wasn't for the Lighthouse Bill and Irene Ridgeway

Paperback, 112 pages. Published by Gospel Folio Press, 304 Killaly St West, Port Colborne, Ontario, L3K 6A6.

ISBN 978-1-927521-56-4

If you want to know if missionaries have the same anxieties as we have, the same fears when confronted with the unexpected, the same doubts and worries, then you will find this book captivating; written in a very conversational style, it can easily be read in one sitting.

BILL RIDGEWAY's start in life could reflect so many, with disadvantage and lack of opportunity having the potential to drag him down. He stood on the threshold of reform school, until God, in His infinite grace and mercy, laid hold upon him.

Amidst a wave of patriotism, as America joined the Second World War, this young man, now born again, had a desire to serve with his brothers, fighting in the forces. His heavenly Father, however, had a different plan. He was to serve One 'who sticks closer than a brother', first becoming an electrical engineer with the Coastguard. There he learned a skill that would later help him 'fight the good fight', as he sought to bring light to the villages of Ecuador, in more ways than one!

The foreword, written by Bill and Irene's daughter Cookie, gives a flavour of the book and draws the reader into the narrative of a moving and exciting read, right through to the epilogue.

Chapter 2 recounts the Lord's overruling in bringing Bill and Irene together, their love blossoming and growing throughout the chapters that follow. Already with missionary interest at heart, the news that five missionaries had been martyred in Ecuador brought a response from Bill and Irene, 'Please Lord, let us take their place'.

With Ecuador as their home, now with a young family, it soon became clear that their work was to bring light to darkened villages and bring the light of the glorious gospel of Christ to the lives of a people they came to love, fulfilling the scripture 'for God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ'.

This is a good, challenging read, demonstrating that God can, and will, use personal talents and skills for His ultimate glory.

Thanks to Bill Brady, Killamarsh, England, for this review

QUESTION

Should some assemblies consider meeting in a house instead of a hall?

ANSWER

There will be many assemblies where the possibility of meeting in a house would not be a practical option due to the significant number of believers in fellowship. Sadly, this healthy situation is not true everywhere. It is not uncommon to hear of assemblies consisting of just a handful of saints meeting in large buildings that are a financial burden to maintain. In many instances halls are old, in urgent need of upgrading, and are noncompliant with legislation covering buildings open to the public. Whilst the risk of anyone suing an assembly because of its failure to keep in step with statutory obligations may be small, the scriptures afford us no exemption from obeying 'the powers that be'.

Most of these halls were built in the late nineteenth or first half of the twentieth centuries when congregations were considerably greater than is seen currently in western society. Over the last six decades, there has been a continual numerical decline, coupled with an ever increasing average age of those in fellowship. Many brothers and sisters have laboured strenuously to keep their hall secure and presentable, but with weakening health and rising costs the task is becoming impossible to sustain.

In all probability the experience of most readers of this magazine will be that of attending meetings in a building known currently, or formerly, as a 'gospel hall'. From childhood days we were taken to such a place, and any fellowship we have known with other assemblies was no different to what was commonplace, each company met in a hall somewhere. However, an examination of the New Testament reveals that there were a number of assemblies which met in the homes of believers. Philemon was probably a wealthy resident in Colossae, and the assembly he belonged to met in his house, 'Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ . . . unto Philemon our dearly beloved, and fellowlabourer . . . and to the church in thy house', Philem. 1-2.

Within the metropolis of Rome there were possibly several assemblies, and one of these companies met in the home of Priscilla and Aquila, Rom. 16. 5. Prior to that, they had resided in Ephesus, and the church there also met in their home, 1 Cor. 16. 19. In Colossians chapter 4, we read, 'Salute the brethren which are in Laodicea, and Nymphas, and the church which is in his house', v. 15. Opinion is divided as to whether Nymphas is a masculine or feminine name, and further uncertainty pertains as to where Nymphas lived. Some suggest the home was in Laodicea, others believe it was Hierapolis, but, for the purpose of this answer, these queries are not important. What is certain is that the home was used as a meeting place of the assembly.

Whilst these examples do not set before us a biblical principle that is binding on anyone, they do present a very clear precedent and practice. In the first century, several assemblies, across a wide geographical area, met in the homes of God's people. Of course, to emulate these practices someone has to be willing to open their home, and this will necessitate their house having suitable access and space to accommodate those that will come along. Due consideration would also need to be shown to neighbours. Noise disturbance, or parking problems, would not enhance the testimony of the assembly, and they would certainly deter unbelievers from expressing any interest in coming to a meeting.

None of the foregoing considerations are insurmountable. I fear that our biggest barrier to vacating our halls, and reverting to what happened in Colossae, Rome and Ephesus, is the reticence to even think about it. We can easily produce several reasons why we may not want to do it, but many of us are reticent to consider the benefits and viability of such a step. Where there are saints facing the dilemma of how to maintain their present building, may they have the courage and foresight to seriously consider the possibility of vacating their hall and becoming a 'church in thy house'.

Chairman:

RUTHERFORD RABEY

34 Willow Way, Ponteland,
Newcastle upon Tyne NE20 9RF, UK

Treasurer:

HOWARD COLES

Pitcot Farm, Pitcot Lane, Stratton-on-the-Fosse,
Radstock BA3 4SX, UK

Secretary:

JOHN SCARBROOK

34 Metcalfe Avenue, Killamarsh,
Sheffield S21 1HW, UK

General Editor:

JOHN BENNETT

19 Alfreton Road, Pinxton, Nottingham NG16 6JZ

Section Editors:

Reports and News – SANDY JACK

62 Kings Avenue, Eastbourne BN21 2PD

Histories, Services – IAN GRANT

395c Gt. Western Road, Aberdeen AB10 6NY

YPS – STEPHEN BAKER

25 General Drive, West Derby,
Liverpool L12 4ZB

Other Trust Members:

Jonathan Black, Brian Clatworthy,
Richard Collings, Ian Rees,
Stephen Sherwin, Ken Totton.

All committee members can be contacted at

info@preciousseed.org
or via 0044(0)1142 511700

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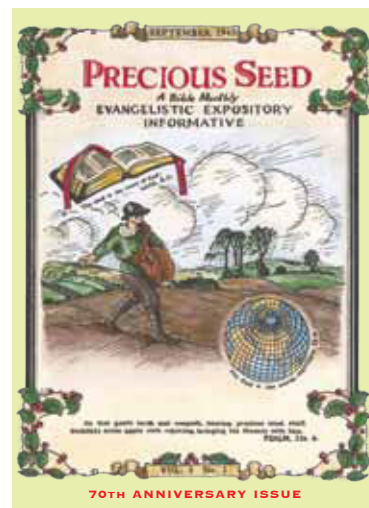


Precious Seed International

Front Cover Illustration

'He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him', Ps. 126. 6

It is more than fitting that in the seventieth year of publication we should again highlight this stimulating text, which once regularly featured on the front page and provided the eponymous title of the magazine. Psalm 126 forms part of a group of Psalms, Pss. 120-134, which are linked together by the Hebrew superscription 'A Song of degrees' or, literally, 'ascents'. The Septuagint renders the superscript as the 'Song of the steps', and this has given rise to a number of theories of which the most convincing one is that this collection of Psalms were 'pilgrim songs', sung by bands of pilgrims as they journeyed up to the temple in Jerusalem to celebrate the great annual festivals of Jehovah, Exod. 23. 17; Deut. 16. 16. Passages such as Psalm 42 verse 4 and Isaiah chapter 30 verse 29, clearly suggest that it was not unusual for pilgrims to sing *en route*. On one such occasion the delirium of these pilgrims was evident as they remembered how God had changed their past circumstances, which, for them, was like a dream come true, v. 1. Subsequently, this led them to testify to the Lord's goodness, and they were delighted to share this knowledge with other nations, vv. 2-3. And when we think about the past ministry of Precious Seed, we are thankful to God for not only giving our predecessors a vision that was realized, but also the desire to communicate that vision to others. The psalmist in verses 4-6 then looks to God for further blessing as His earlier intervention on their behalf becomes the stimulus for future action. Regardless of the difficulties of the time, and the seeming aridity of their present lives – hence, the reference to the dry river beds in the Negev, v. 4, cp. Joel 1. 20, they are encouraged to take heart and renew themselves in the Lord, v. 4. Even though sowing seed can often be a back-breaking and tearful experience, cp. Jer. 31. 9, the end result leads to joyfulness, cp. Job 8. 21, and a certain harvest, vv. 5-6, cp. 1 Cor. 3. 6. What power there is in precious seed, Luke 8. 11! As we carry on God's work today and look to Him for future blessing, may we be found as faithful as those who have gone before us, Heb. 12. 1-2.



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