

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1471

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for the World
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***Heaven, Hell
or Somewhere
Else? – page 5***

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Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

122nd Year

M06

1471

A monthly magazine published by the Christadelphians (brothers and sisters in Christ) and available throughout the world. Its objectives are – to encourage study of the Bible as God's inspired message to men; to call attention to the Divine offer of forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ; and to warn men and women that soon Christ will return to Earth as judge and ruler of God's world-wide Kingdom.

**Magazine orders to the address nearest you.
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Publisher: The Glad Tidings Publishing Association (a registered charity) number 248352

Bible Talks, Study Classes, Sunday Schools and Youth Clubs are held regularly by Christadelphians worldwide. The address of your nearest group can be obtained from either the Distribution Secretaries or from the local agents or information addresses given above.

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Acknowledgements

Photographs:

Autumn Scene
photos.com

Illustrations:

Clipart.com pgs 3-8,10-12,16;
Christian Clipart 8a,13; CMPA 9.

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The version most used in this issue is the New King James Version (NKJV) and other versions are sometimes used.

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Stern Words for the World

When British Chancellor Gordon Brown asked an economist to review the world situation and make some observations about climate change, he may not have been expecting such a devastating report as the one that was published in London this October.

Sir Nicholas Stern is the former chief economist of the World Bank and his 600 page “Stern Report” makes grim reading for anyone who cares about the environment.

Stern Report

By now it is obvious to most people that the climate is changing and that disastrous consequences can result. Droughts, floods and hurricanes in various parts of the world show that things are changing; ice caps and glaciers are melting, and it has become commonplace for people to warn about the catastrophic consequences of rising sea levels and suchlike.

Now, for the first time, an economist has tried to calculate what this changing situation might cost the world, and how it could damage the world economy. His estimates are frightening, if you care about that sort of thing.

Sir Nicholas reckons that the financial consequences of global warming could shrink the global economy by a fifth. The computed

sum – £3.8 trillion pounds sterling – won’t mean much to us, but the idea that our standard of living could drop by one fifth certainly does. And if it is likely to hurt the developed world, think what the impact would be upon the developing world. Tearfund Director, Andy Atkins, was quick to point that out when he said: *“Poor communities, who have contributed least to climate change, are suffering the most from its effects. Current efforts to respond to climate change are simply not urgent enough.”*

Warning about Warming

The report forecasts the following consequences, if no urgent action is taken:

- ❖ *Floods from rising sea levels could displace up to 100 million people;*
- ❖ *Melting glaciers could cause water shortages for 1 in 6 of the world’s population;*
- ❖ *Wildlife will be harmed; at worst up to 40% of species could become extinct*
- ❖ *Droughts may create tens or even hundreds of millions of ‘climate refugees’.*

These are huge issues and, once again, world leaders are being challenged to do something. Initial reaction in London was that it was vital to bring the US and China on board, as they are huge economies and have commensurately large CO² emissions. But those nations have been refusing to reduce emissions, partly because of the immediate economic impact that



would have; and they may simply choose to ignore these warnings too. Meanwhile other nations are likely to start to change their taxation regimes to try to penalise companies and individuals who either waste resources or do little to



Melting Polar Icecaps

curb the release of greenhouse gases. If the world economy is going to face a huge bill for doing nothing, some world leaders will take the view that people had better start paying now, in an attempt to head off some of the worst predictions.

Warnings Ignored

Already people are casting doubt upon these forecasts by saying the future may not be that bleak. We should not be surprised at that. For, over the years, many people have issued dire warnings which were ignored.

A man once warned that a global catastrophe was coming and only his family took any notice; everybody else drowned. A prophet of God was living in Jerusalem when the city was under siege from the Babylonians and he urged the people to surrender before the city was taken. They would not and they suffered greatly as a result.

The greatest prophet ever once predicted the coming of an invading army against Jerusalem, and he specified exactly how it would be overthrown:

“Now as (Jesus) drew near, he saw the city (Jerusalem) and wept over it, saying ... ‘The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the

time of your visitation”
(Luke 19:41-44).

That was the prediction, made in about the year 30 AD, and 40 years later Jerusalem was besieged by the Romans in exactly that way. The city walls were breached, its inhabitants were killed or

deported, and the city was razed to the ground. The Jerusalem temple, destined to be one of the wonders of the ancient world, was completely demolished. But only a very few people listened to the warning and took avoiding action.

Not Too Late

Just as the position with climate change is just about recoverable if nations take concerted and urgent action, so we can escape a grim future if we listen to the warnings in God’s Word and make some changes to our life style. This time it’s not a question of cutting back our carbon emissions, recycling our waste, or using fewer natural resources. Instead it’s a matter of listening to what God has to say in the Bible and taking the necessary action.

God wants men and women who are willing to listen to Him and believe in what He is about to do. The nations of the world will not take the necessary action: they never do. But God will act to save the earth and to recover it for those who survive to inhabit it as an everlasting possession. There are some stern words in the Bible, because God wants us to take Him seriously; but there are also the most gracious and loving words there you could ever hope for. God is waiting for us to respond while there is still time.

Editor

Heaven, Hell or Somewhere Else?

Many ideas exist about our likely destiny after death, some of them comforting and others disturbing. In this article **Mark Sawyer** reviews some of those beliefs, examines them in the light of Bible teaching and explains what we need to do if we are to end up where we really want to be.

Where are we going?

For many people who call themselves Christians, Heaven is thought to be the place of reward immediately after death. It is considered to be the place where the immortal souls of “good” people end up. Admittedly, there is a great deal of flexibility about who qualifies as sufficiently “good” to get there and nowadays, in a tolerant society, people tend towards the idea that most people will be saved, although there is a good deal more uncertainty about what will happen to the wicked, especially if they are thought to live forever.

In other religions, concepts of heaven vary widely. Buddhists, for example, describe it as Nirvana, the state of existence in which desires are extinct. Hindu worshippers of Vishnu believe they will go to heaven and live on in the glory of Vishnu’s eternal light. Moslems believe heaven to be the location of Paradise to which faithful Moslems go, having passed by, or gone through, hell on the way.

Islam views paradise as a pleasure garden in heaven in which the immortal souls of the blessed experience the utmost sensual and spiritual happiness, following resurrection and judgment at

the end of the world. “Martyrs” go direct to a place of bliss and then pass easily into the real paradise on the Day of Judgment. These views make martyrdom a more tolerable option than might otherwise be the case.

What about Hell?

Some Christians, though certainly far fewer than in earlier generations, believe Hell to be a place of fiery torment and damnation for the souls of the wicked. It is considered to be a place which is superintended by the supernatural Devil, attended by his fallen angels, who have now become demons. There are some quite vivid ideas about in certain quarters as to what life in Hell might be like.

Moslems describe hell as a huge, fiery crater beneath a narrow bridge and believe that all souls must cross that bridge to reach paradise. Those who are damned fall from the bridge and suffer burning torment.

Those who follow the teaching of the 6th century BC Persian prophet Zoroaster believe that on the fourth day after death their souls go to the Bridge of the Requiter, where their deeds are weighed. If good outweighs evil, the bridge broadens and souls go to heaven. If evil outweighs good, the bridge narrows and



souls fall into hell and suffer freezing torment until the resurrection. If good and evil are equal, souls are held in the place of the mixed where they suffer both heat and cold.

Judaism, before the onset of Persian and Greek influence, regarded Hell or Sheol as the grave – it was thought of as a covered place where the unconscious dead had gone. After being influenced by Persian and Greek thinking, Jews regarded Gehenna as the infernal region of fiery punishment for the wicked.

Purgatory or Limbo?

One major church has a doctrine of Purgatory, this being the condition of the soul of a person who has died in a state of grace but who has not been purified prior to entering heaven. The same major church also has the doctrine of Limbo, this being the border place between heaven and hell for souls which are not condemned to Hell and yet which are not qualified for Heaven. Since the mid-16th century differences of opinion have remained about Limbo and this doctrine remains problematic. Neither Purgatory nor Limbo are mentioned in the Bible and, interestingly enough, this non-Biblical teaching is now going out of fashion even among those who once taught it!

Asian religions such as Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism believe in reincarnation and the doctrine of karma – the law of cause and effect. What one does in this life determines the nature of the next life. Transmigration of souls is endless until one achieves salvation. Sikhs believe in a last judgment when souls, reincarnated a number of times, will be absorbed into God.

First Century Christianity

In contradistinction to all of the ideas mentioned so far, the earliest Christians fervently expected the earth to be the location of God's future Kingdom centred in Jerusalem, following the return to earth of Christ, the resurrection and the judgment. They believed the earth to be the place of reward for all faithful people, and considered that it was destined to be filled with God's glory. For them, the words of Jesus appeared to offer a clear-cut promise that gave them real hope, both for themselves and for the earth:

"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5).

Heaven was understood to be the dwelling place of God, where God's will (and only His will) is done. And they believed that Jesus has gone to heaven, where he now sits at the right hand of God, until the time when he will return to rule as King upon the earth. So the apostle Paul could explain the future in these terms:

"I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first" (1 Thessalonians 4:13-16).

Summary

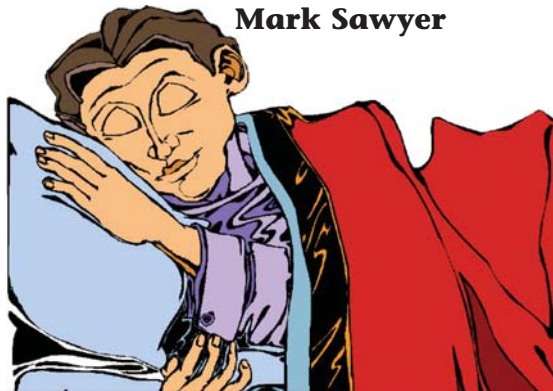
Are any of these beliefs in accord with Bible teaching? Let's see if we can draw an overall conclusion about these ideas. It's really a pretty obvious one. The essential foundation for all of them, bar the last one, attributed in the encyclopedia Britannica to the earliest Christians, is the concept of the immortality of the soul and the belief that human beings continue to have a conscious existence after death. Without that inner spark of immortality, these beliefs have absolutely no substance!

But do you notice something about this Bible passage? The apostle writes about the dead as though they are unconscious – sleeping or asleep. And he makes no mention of something that people sometimes find difficult – how

their immortal souls and risen bodies come together, if that is what happens.

All of this raises a question we need to examine carefully: "Does the Bible teach that we have immortal souls?" That will be something to look at next time.

Mark Sawyer



Days that changed my life

Pharaoh's Butler

I got such a terrible shock. One morning as I entered the palace dining suite to give my Egyptian King his morning drink, I suddenly found my way barred by the guards. I knew them well and thought initially that they were joking. Within hours, I was in a particularly foul smelling dungeon with the royal baker. It seems that there had been a plot against Pharaoh's life and because the authorities were not sure which of us was guilty of the conspiracy they arrested us both.

I knew I was innocent, but that was of little help and it was plain that within days I might be dead if found guilty of treason. However, there

was a young Hebrew lad, Joseph, in his early twenties by his looks, in the prison who acted as our servant. He seemed to be more in charge than the gaoler. He ran things smoothly and honestly and he was trusted, in fact, everyone seemed to like him. He too was in prison because of a false accusation but his accusers just seemed to have forgotten about him and left him there.

Telling Dream

After some weeks, it seemed that the authorities had also forgotten us and I for one became rather depressed. Then one night I had a vivid dream. I told it to the baker. He also had had



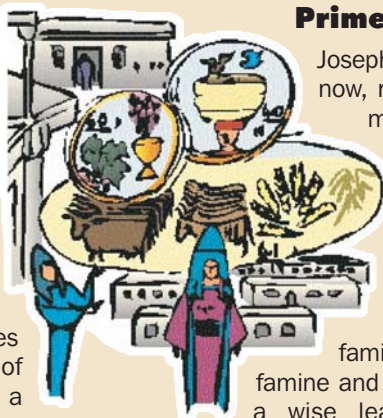
a colourful vision. His involved birds pecking food from a basket perched on his head.

Joseph noticed that we were miserable and puzzled and asked if he could help. I told him that it seemed that we would never be released from prison and about my dream of my picking grapes from a vine, the juice of which I gave to Pharaoh in a special cup. At once Joseph seemed to be alert and thinking. Apparently, his God had helped him understand the meaning of dreams. “Cheer up”, he said, “the dream is simple, three days from now you will be back serving Pharaoh”. He was precisely right. Three days later I was declared innocent and went back to work. The baker? He was executed for treason. His dream was true too. The pecking birds had meant a hanging.

What about Joseph?

In spite of this amazing incident, I became so engrossed with giving especially good service that I forgot about Joseph, in spite of his kindness and his request to be remembered. It was over two years later that I remembered him and his ability to interpret and then it was because of another dream. Pharaoh had dreamt about some cattle; seemingly one lot ate up the other lot and, being superstitious, the monarch wanted to know the meaning of his dream.

I felt guilty as I hurried with the officials to get Joseph from prison. The poor man had helped me and I had done nothing in return until now. Pharaoh later gave me a dressing down for my stupidity.



Joseph had help from God to discern the meaning of dreams

Prime Minister

Joseph is the Prime Minister now, running the country and my life has changed considerably. Joseph showed Pharaoh that his dream was about the economy. There would be seven years of excellent harvest followed by seven years of famine. We are now in the famine and Joseph is proving to be a wise leader, food is shared between all the people. His family have turned up too. It seems that they all worship this

mighty God who can reveal dreams.

I try to serve Pharaoh and Joseph faithfully. He has explained to me how his God caused his imprisonment so that he and his family and the rest of us could survive. It's all part of a plan that God has to make Josephs' people a special group who will help all the people in the world to understand how best to serve God. I don't understand it all, something to do with promises to Abraham (Josephs' great grandfather), but I do know that he helped to save my life and so I am starting to find out about Joseph's God. He sounds really interesting.

Cynthia Miles

See Genesis chapters 40 and 41



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Christadelphians – What Do they Believe?

*Founded by Dr John Thomas, the Christadelphians had taken that name – which means ‘brothers and sisters in Christ’ – to distinguish themselves from other religious groups. Dr Thomas was a prolific writer in books and magazines but when he died, in 1871, was the movement he had started going to end with him? This is the question that **Robert Tarrant** now answers as he explains how the movement developed and what Christadelphians still believe.*

19th Century Religion

We need to remember that the 19th century was a time of intense religious debate; it was a time when many people felt passionate about the proper understanding of the Bible and when opinions could change quite markedly as new ideas surfaced or different views found favour. But despite this the Christadelphians have remained firm in what they believe to be the true teaching of the Bible, related as it is to the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In 1853 Robert Roberts was baptized – he was the young boy who had once heard Dr Thomas preach during a visit to Britain – and for over 40 years Robert became a leading figure in the new movement. He had started a magazine under the Doctor’s direction and over the following years it was he who gave much guidance and assisted with the development of the Christadelphian community. Sometimes he is credited with changing a movement into a denomination.

Events in Robert Robert’s life had dictated that he moved south from Scotland to Huddersfield, where he delivered a

course of 12 lectures with an attendance of some 100 visitors at each meeting. These addresses were later published in a book entitled “*Christendom Astray*”, the content of which made a tremendous impression on its readers. It is impossible to say how many have accepted the Lord Jesus Christ in baptism as the result of this book, which is still available today.

To Birmingham

With his wife, Robert Roberts would walk each Sunday from Huddersfield to Halifax and back for the meetings, a journey of some 7 miles. Often he was almost penniless, yet he was motivated by that one desire to exhort his fellow believers and preach the saving truth of the Word of God. In time he moved to Birmingham and, by his pen and preaching, Christadelphian ecclesias were established throughout the country, the bulk of which are still in operation today.

The work and life of this faithful servant of the Lord can be read in far greater detail than we can review now in books entitled, “*Robert Roberts*” by Islip Collyer, and “*My Days and My Ways*,” his autobiography.



It was while on a return journey home from Australia and New Zealand that Robert Roberts fell asleep suddenly at the age of 59 at San Francisco and was laid to rest by the side of Dr. Thomas in Brooklyn Cemetery, New York. As Islip Collyer writes: *“These two stalwart labourers who had sacrificed all human interests on the altar of their faith, lay side by side in the prison house of death, ‘prisoners of hope’ awaiting the unerring judgment of the last day.”*

As we write now, over 100 years on from those days, the Christadelphian community has grown to be a worldwide organization with ecclesias (or congregations) in every continent of the world in small or greater numbers.

Much of this growth has been due, in large measure, to the work of The Bible Mission organization which has been established following the ending of the Second World War and lots of other things have happened in the community to develop care and welfare facilities for members at home and abroad, both those in ecclesias and those who are living by themselves.

Christadelphian Beliefs

We have already stated in these articles that our witness to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ has not changed over the years because our faith is firmly based upon and rooted in the Bible. So let us briefly summarise what we believe under six short headings.

❖ **We Believe in One God**

He is the God who first created and



Christadelphians are a Bible-based community

now sustains all things. He is a unity in person, character and purpose. He does not change and He has declared in His Word that *“His glory will fill the earth”*. The prophet Isaiah wrote: “

“For thus says the LORD, who created the heavens, who is God, who formed the earth and made it, who has established it, who did not create it in vain, who formed it to be inhabited: ‘I am the LORD, and there is no other’”(Isaiah 45:18).

❖ **We Believe the Bible – Genesis to Revelation**

The Old Testament looks forward to the New Testament, and the New interprets the Old. Our understanding of Bible truth is the same as that of the apostle Paul who said:

“The Holy Scriptures ... are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:15-17).

❖ **We Believe in Jesus Christ**

The Lord Jesus Christ is the Son of God, our Saviour (the name “Jesus” means Saviour). He was born of the Virgin Mary by *“the power of the highest”*. He lived a perfect life; he did no sin and died to save mankind. God raised him from the dead thus declaring him to be the *“Son of God with power”*. That pow-

er will be displayed publicly when Jesus returns visibly to earth as the King of the whole world.

❖ **We Believe In God's Kingdom**

This coming Kingdom will be worldwide, with its capital in Jerusalem. When Jesus rules from there, as once God had kings who ruled over His kingdom, when it existed before, he will bring untold blessings to the world. It will be a Kingdom of righteousness and peace, a time when the kingdom of men will give place to the Kingdom of God.

Unlike human rule, which is limited by mortality, God's Kingdom will last for ever. The prophet Isaiah, in particular, gives wonderful pen pictures of this glorious age, which is soon to dawn upon our war-stricken world.

"The ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with singing, with everlasting joy on their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away" (Isaiah 35:10).

❖ **We Believe in the Return of Jesus**

Jesus is to return in person to this earth to establish the Kingdom of God. *"This same Jesus shall so come"; "God shall send Jesus Christ"; "The Lord Jesus Christ ... shall judge the quick (the living) and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom."* This event is a certainty; we can have complete confidence in this truth because God himself has promised it. This is what the Apostle Paul said about it:

"(God) has appointed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom he has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising him from the dead" (Acts 17:31).

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is such a well-attested fact that we can have total confidence that Jesus will return from heaven to establish a Kingdom that will totally transform this world and fill it with God's glory.

❖ **We Believe in Baptism**

It is by baptism – complete immersion in water into the saving name of Jesus Christ after a confession of belief in the Gospel – that we take the first essential step to salvation. By this act of obedience to God's commands we unite ourselves with the saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ and being figuratively *'risen with him'* we can await in faith the day when Christ will appear. The invitation to be part of God's purpose in this way was first issued by the apostle Peter, and is still open to us today:

"Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38).

Unchanging Truth

These six basic elements of the Christadelphian faith (and there are others) are firmly based upon the truth of the Bible. They have been the rock-like foundation for the lives of many Christadelphians since the days of Dr. Thomas. It is a faith that brings peace of mind during this mortal existence because it gives us a real and living hope in the coming day of resurrection, a faith which, by the grace of God, will finally come to its fulfilment in the coming Kingdom of God.

To all our readers, we say, think on these things, and make the wise decision now to embrace *"The one hope, the one Lord, the one faith, the one baptism."*

Robert Tarrant



Christ and the State

In these articles, **Tom Barling** has shown that the Lord Jesus taught that his disciples would belong to a new society, one that would be open to all nationalities, not merely to Jews. Now he examines how the believers were to interact with the countries in which they lived, especially if their laws were contrary to the commands of the believers' Lord and Master.

From East and West

As we saw early in this series, when speaking about the future the Lord Jesus foretold that men and women would come from all parts of the compass to sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom he would establish (Matthew 8:11).

This picture of God's kingdom was prompted by the faith of a Roman officer. Once more we must stress this great truth – Faith is the essential characteristic of all who belong to God's new society.

Then, as we considered the third chapter of Paul's letter to the Philippians, we saw how the apostle brought out what was distinctive, indeed unique, in the hope embraced by all disciples – that the Lord would return from heaven to transform our present bodies to be like his own glorious body (3:20-21).

Multi-National Community

By the time the Apostle wrote to the Philippians, the Christian church had become a multi-national community. In his letter to the Colossians, Paul says this:

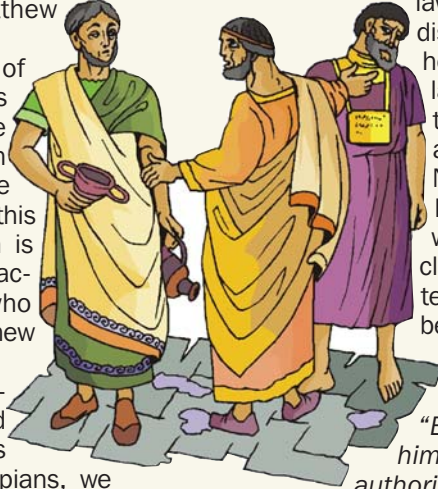
“Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all” (3:11).

However that might have been, the majority of the members lived in the Roman Empire and were subject to its laws. Indeed, wherever a disciple lived, then as now, he was or is subject to the laws of the land. What then should be his or her attitude to those laws? No one knew better than Paul the problems that would be faced. This is clearly revealed in a chapter he wrote to the Roman believers. We quote in full the early verses of chapter 13:

“Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves” (13:1,2).

Model Citizens

The logical outcome of this advice is obvious: in no circumstances should a disciple be an agitator, or someone



who would use force to rectify what might appear to be unjust. He should not grumble about the taxes that have to be paid, however onerous they may seem (w 6-7). Tax evasion is all too often practised, but a disciple should in no circumstance attempt this.

Likewise, if a debt is incurred, it should be paid promptly (v.8). The only debt, or obligation a disciple should discharge, is the need to love one another: *“for he who loves his fellow-man has fulfilled the law”* (v. 8). Then Paul quotes a selection of the Ten Commandments which are aimed at avoiding wrong to another: no disciple is to commit adultery, murder, theft, or be guilty of coveting (v.9).

The contrary of all this is a love which embraces one's neighbour: *“love your neighbour as yourself”* (v.9). Here, and this may surprise some, the Apostle is yet once more going back to the Old Testament, for the Israelites had been instructed by their God to: *“love your neighbour as yourself”* (Leviticus 19:18). There can be no doubt that Paul constantly strove to show the importance of the Old Testament as a vital part of God's revelation.

Modelled on Jesus

Moreover Paul was deeply conscious that he was an emissary for the Lord Jesus and that his own teaching should be in harmony with that of his Lord; all that is revealed in Romans 12, the chapter preceding the one from which we have just been quoting so freely.

Here's an example of how closely Paul was modelling his teaching on that of his Lord. He says this:

“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse” (12:14).

This is contrary to all our instincts, yet this exacting ideal was an echo of the Lord's own teaching, as Paul was well aware. For the Lord at an early stage in his ministry said this to all those who accounted themselves his followers:

“But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (Matthew 5:44-45).

As this was early on in his ministry it is apparent that the Lord Jesus was not appealing to all and sundry but to the few. He was himself in the most

difficult of circumstances to demonstrate that he could be true to his own teaching. After being scourged, an experience which sometimes itself produced the death of the victim, and eventually being on the cross with all its agony, he could pray: *“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing”* (Luke 23:34). These must surely be reckoned amongst the most sublime words

ever uttered. Yet they were to be echoed for when Stephen the first Christian martyr was stoned to death by the Jews, he prayed: *“Lord, do not hold this sin against them”* (Acts 7:60).

Conversion Experience

Ironically, a party to the stoning of Stephen was Saul of Tarsus, later far better known as the apostle Paul. Both the prayers of the Lord Jesus and of Stephen were answered, for Saul became a dedicated disciple, deeply



conscious of the amazing grace he had received. Years later, he reminded one of his converts, Timothy:

“Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 1:13-14).

After his conversion, Paul was himself subjected to constant and cruel persecution by his fellow countrymen. In one place he records: *“Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one” (2 Corinthians 11:24)*, which makes a total of 195 lashes! What was his reaction to this inhuman and repeated treatment?

In his letter to the Romans from which we have quoted already, he states: *“Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved” (10:1)*. There is no trace of resentment in these words but a huge willingness to overlook and forgive.

Thus, we have been able to consider the example first of our Lord, then of that truly beautiful character, Stephen, and finally the example of one who had been a relentless persecutor of the Christian faith: Saul of Tarsus. In all instances there is an impressive consistency, and we see the same grace of forgiveness revealed in each case. These are truly members of God’s new society.

Spiritual Revolution

As we survey our contemporary world and see men tearing each other apart, it must be apparent that there is little knowledge, not to mention practice, of the principles with which we have been concerned. From the beginning, Jesus

was conscious he was launching a spiritual revolution which would have few followers. In one place, he speaks of his ‘little flock’ (Luke 12:32). After he had chosen the twelve apostles, he warned them in no uncertain terms of the persecutions they would endure:

““Be on your guard against men; they will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their synagogues. On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles” (Matthew 10:17-18).

No Exaggeration

As we read the book of Acts, with its absorbing account of the apostles’ activities, we see the Lord was in no sense exaggerating. Indeed, in one place we encounter the record of the execution of one of the Twelve, James the brother of John, at the hands of one of the Herods. The same king arrested Peter with the express intention of killing him also (see Acts 12:1-4) but he was miraculously delivered (vv. 5-11).

When we contemplate these examples of forgiveness, surely we must acknowledge that not only the Lord Jesus himself, but his disciples as well, were capable of behaving in harmony with the Lord’s teaching. The latter were in every sense members of God’s new society; they had followed a code of conduct which needs our further attention. It is one that challenges us to change the way we think and act if we are to join that group of people who believe and who live according to those beliefs.

Tom Barling

Quotations from the NIV

The Miracles of Jesus 6

The Man born Blind

*The miracles or signs which are recorded in John's gospel are often associated with teachings which explain what those marvellous works teach us about the purpose of God. This time, as **Ralph Green** explains, the explanation comes in the dialogue that follows the healing, during which the healed man demonstrates steady progress from uncertainty about Jesus to belief in him.*

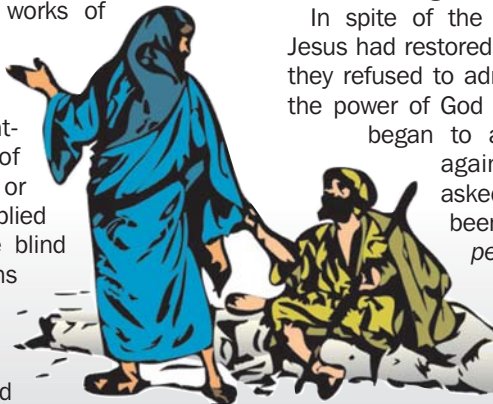
God's Works Revealed

John's description of this miracle of healing is followed by an animated discussion during which the enemies of Jesus try to find something wrong in what he did. The miracle and those conversations take up the whole of chapter 9 of John's gospel and are well worth reading in full.

It all started when a question was asked by the disciples about the possibility of the man or his parents having sinned. They wanted to know if this was the reason why he had been born blind. Instead, Jesus made the claim that all this had happened so *"that the works of God should be revealed in him"* (9:3).

The man's infirmity was God's opportunity and what Jesus said indicated that he now intended to perform a miracle of healing. It was not his own power that would be instrumental in accomplishing the cure; as Jesus said many times he did the works of God – *"Him who sent me"*.

Jesus proceeded to make an ointment consisting of dust and saliva, or spit, which he applied to the eyes of the blind man with instructions for him to go and wash his eyes in the pool of Siloam. The record



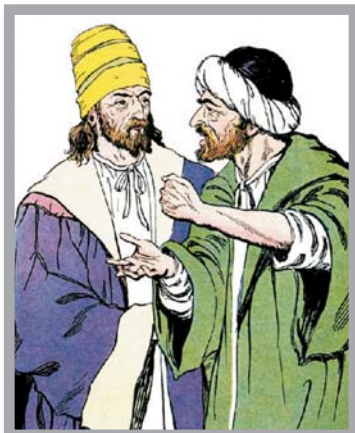
says with wonderful economy: *"So he went and washed, and came back seeing"* (9:7). Evidently this previously blind man had faith in the power that Jesus possessed because he readily complied with the Lord's instructions. Being blind, some kind friend or relative would doubtless have accompanied him to the pool.

Varied Reactions

His neighbours and others who knew him were astonished when they saw the change. They naturally wanted to know how his cure came about, so he told them. The fact that this miracle had been performed on a Sabbath day was bound to be criticised by the Pharisees, especially in this case when Jesus made an ointment of dust and saliva to apply to his eyes. The Pharisees regarded this as 'work' which was not to be done on a Sabbath. For them, what Jesus had done was bad not good.

In spite of the marvellous fact that Jesus had restored sight to a blind man, they refused to admit that he had used the power of God to heal. Instead they began to accumulate evidence against Jesus, so they asked the man who had been cured how it happened. He simply said: *"He put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and I see"* (9:15).

An argument broke out among the Pharisees as to whether a miracle can be performed by a sinner, with some saying: "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?" (John 9:16). So they asked the cured man what he thought of Jesus and he said: "He is a prophet." Still not satisfied, the Pharisees then asked the parents about their son. "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" (9:19). They agreed that he was indeed their son but when it came to explaining how he came to see, they were worried because "the Jews had agreed already that if anyone confessed that he was Christ, he would be put out of the synagogue" (9:22), so they replied, "He is of age ask him".



Simple Truth

In their folly, the Pharisees called the cured man again to discuss the morality of the case. They said, "Give God the glory! We know that this man is a sinner." The cured man did not accept that assessment, but stuck to the facts of the case:

"Whether he is a sinner or not I do not know. One thing I know: that though I was blind, now I see" (9:25).

Pursuing their enquiry, they then asked, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" Try and imagine the situation. Here was this poor man, for years left to his own quiet meditations, who was being subjected to relentless interrogation by these overbearing Pharisees. It seems as if his patience was wearing a little thin for this time his

answer was brief and to the point, and in making it he made a remarkable confession, one that his interrogators spotted at once:

*"I told you already, and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? **Do you also want to become his disciples?**' Then they reviled him and said, 'You are his disciple, but we are Moses' disciples'" (9:27,28).*

The argument had become heated and this is illustrated in the New International Version of that very verse: "Then they hurled insults at him and said, 'You are this fellow's disciple! We are disciples of Moses! We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow we don't even know where he comes from'".

The Origin of Divine Power

The cured man took up the challenge and in doing so showed that he was a formidable opponent. With ruthless logic he pointed out to these learned men:

"Why, this is a marvellous thing, that you do not know where he is from, and yet he has opened my eyes! Now we know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshipper of God and does his will, he hears him. Since the world began it has been unheard of that anyone opened the eyes of one who was born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing" (9:30-33).

They had lost the argument and resorted to abuse: "They answered and said to him, 'You were completely born in sins, and are you teaching us?' And they cast him out" (of the synagogue). To excommunicate someone meant that the one excommunicated lost many privileges as

well as suffering the reproach associated with being thrown out.

Jesus in Support

Jesus was quick to provide moral support for this persecuted man and sought him out, perhaps this being the first time the man had actually seen Jesus.

“Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when he had found him, he said to him, ‘Do you believe in the Son of God?’ He answered and said, ‘Who is he, Lord, that I may believe in him?’ And Jesus said to him, ‘You have both seen him and it is he who is talking with you.’ Then he said, ‘Lord, I believe!’ And he worshipped him” (9:35-38).

Here was a lovely conclusion to the compassion that Jesus had shown to this

man who had been born blind and who had now been thrown out by the Jewish establishment. Now he was able to see the One who had been so kind to him and he had worked his way through, thanks to the Pharisees, to an understanding of a great Truth – that Jesus, the miracle worker, was indeed the Son of God.

That process is one we too should follow. For all of us are blind at first to the nature and person of the Lord Jesus Christ and when we read and learn about him, our eyes can be opened and our understanding enlarged. Like the blind man, we too can choose to follow the Lord.

Ralph Green.

Growth of the Gospel – 20

Paul in Asia Again

*The Council at Jerusalem were agreed that Gentiles should be accepted into the early church provided they believed and were baptized. They did not need to become Jews but they were to cease being pagans, as **John Hellawell** explained in the last article in this series. So what would Paul and Barnabus do now?*

Second Missionary Journey

They had been with the believers in Antioch in Syria and, after a while, Paul suggested to Barnabas that they ought to visit the churches founded during their First Missionary Journey to see how they were prospering. Barnabas agreed and proposed that they took John Mark once more; but Paul disagreed with that suggestion, because earlier he had deserted the group and returned home when they went to Pamphylia. Sadly, both men were firm in their resolve, Paul would not contemplate taking John Mark and Barnabas was not prepared to go

without him.

As the matter could not be reconciled amicably, Barnabas set off with Mark to revisit Cyprus. Paul invited Silas to accompany him and, commended to God's grace by the disciples in Antioch, set off through Syria and Cilicia to visit the converts in Galatia, strengthening the other churches on the way.

Overland to Asia Minor

This time Paul travelled overland north-westwards through modern Turkey rather than by sea, as on the first journey. As they headed for central Asia Minor they

would have traversed the “Cilician Gates”, the narrow passage through the Taurus Mountains in Paul’s home region. Eventually they reached Derbe, the terminus of the First Missionary Journey, and then on to Lystra once more.

There they met Timothy and his family, who were converted, in all probability, during the previous visit. Timothy was a young man and highly regarded locally. It seems that Paul decided that here was someone who could readily fill the gap left by John Mark’s absence (Acts 13:13; 15:38). Timothy was to play an important role in spreading the Gospel and later he was the recipient of two letters which are now part of the New Testament.

Timothy was already a disciple and had the distinction of dual nationality. His father was a Greek – a Gentile – but his

is highly likely that his Gentile father would have forbidden this as Gentiles regarded the act as “mutilation” of the body.

Now that his father was dead (something that is implied in the original Greek) it would be possible for him to be circumcised, without causing offence, and Paul did this so that he would be accepted fully as a Jew amongst the Jews in that area, and at the other locations which Paul planned to visit. That gave him a sort of dual citizenship: he would be acceptable to both Jews and Gentiles, and that would be invaluable at a time when people were very fussy about such things.

Compromised Principle?

Some believe that Paul compromised his principle that, for those who believe in

Christ, circumcision is of no value. He wrote to the Christians in Galatia, the very region where Timothy lived, as follows:

“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything...” (Galatians 5:6). It was something he repeats later in the same letter (Galatians 6:15) and affirms in other letters (1 Corinthians 7:19 and Colossians 3:11). In the Galatian one he also stresses how he had strongly opposed the suggestion that Titus should be circumcised (Galatians 2:3).

Paul must have had very good reasons for his action, knowing that his opponents would probably seize on it and charge him with duplicity. His principle

was that for those who believe in Christ, circumcision is of no value. He wrote to the Christians in Galatia, the very region where Timothy lived, as follows:



mother was a Jewess. This meant that the Gentiles would recognise him as one of them, since to them nationality was determined by the father. The Jews would normally have regarded him as Jewish, because they determined nationality from the mother. However, it seems that Timothy had not been circumcised as a baby, like other Jewish boys, and so in this respect he was not truly Jewish. It

was not compromised, however, for he resisted the claim that Gentiles should adopt the requirements of the Law of Moses and effectively become Jews before they could be accepted as Christians. This claim had been firmly rejected at the Council in Jerusalem (Acts 15:1-29), where it had been established that Gentiles must refrain from continuing their pagan customs but they were not required to comply with the Law.

In Timothy's case, it was an expedient thing to do if the work was to proceed with maximum impact. As we have already seen, this act made Timothy more effective as Paul's companion than would otherwise have been the case – both to Jews and Gentiles. In some ways it was similar to the apostle himself, who being a Jew – who made no secret of his Jewish ancestry and background – was also a Roman citizen (as was Silas). That additional qualification was due to prove helpful as their journeys proceeded.

Timothy's Character

Timothy has been much maligned by commentators who have drawn the conclusion that he was "soft" or even effeminate. They deduce this from a comment in Paul's second letter to Timothy:

"...I remember you in my prayers night and day, greatly desiring to see you, being mindful of your tears..." (2 Timothy 1:3,4).

It is suggested that this behaviour is inappropriate in a grown man and some writers say that it is only to be expected since, they say, Timothy was raised by his mother and grand mother (2 Tim.1:5) and lacked a father as a role-model. In fact, Paul is there referring to Timothy's Jewish heritage and there is no evidence that his father died in Timothy's childhood. And if tears indicate effeminacy, then Paul and the elders of the church in Ephesus could be so described. For we

read in Acts chapter 20 that Paul said to them: "Watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears" (20:31). And the account continues: "And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. Then they all wept freely, and fell on Paul's neck and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the words which he spoke, that they would see his face no more" (20:36-38).

In reality, there is considerable evidence to contradict the popular view about Timothy's character. It is likely that he was educated in a local, Gentile, school where manliness and athleticism would be as important as intellectual development. This may account for some of the things the apostle later advised him about (1 Timothy 4:8; 5:23).

Most significant of all is the fact that Timothy was willing to join Paul in spite of the hardships which inevitably accompanied missionary life. The experiences of Paul during the First Missionary Journey were well-known to Timothy; indeed he may have witnessed them, for Lystra was his home town. Paul could remind him later:

"But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra – what persecutions I endured..." (2 Timothy 3:10-11).

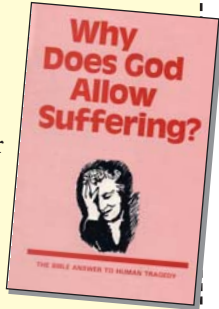
In writing to the Galatians, Paul reminded his readers: "From now on let no one trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus" (Galatians 6:17). These scars would probably still be evident when Timothy willingly accepted the invitation to accompany Paul and Silas. This is not the behaviour of a timid young man!

John Hellawell

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