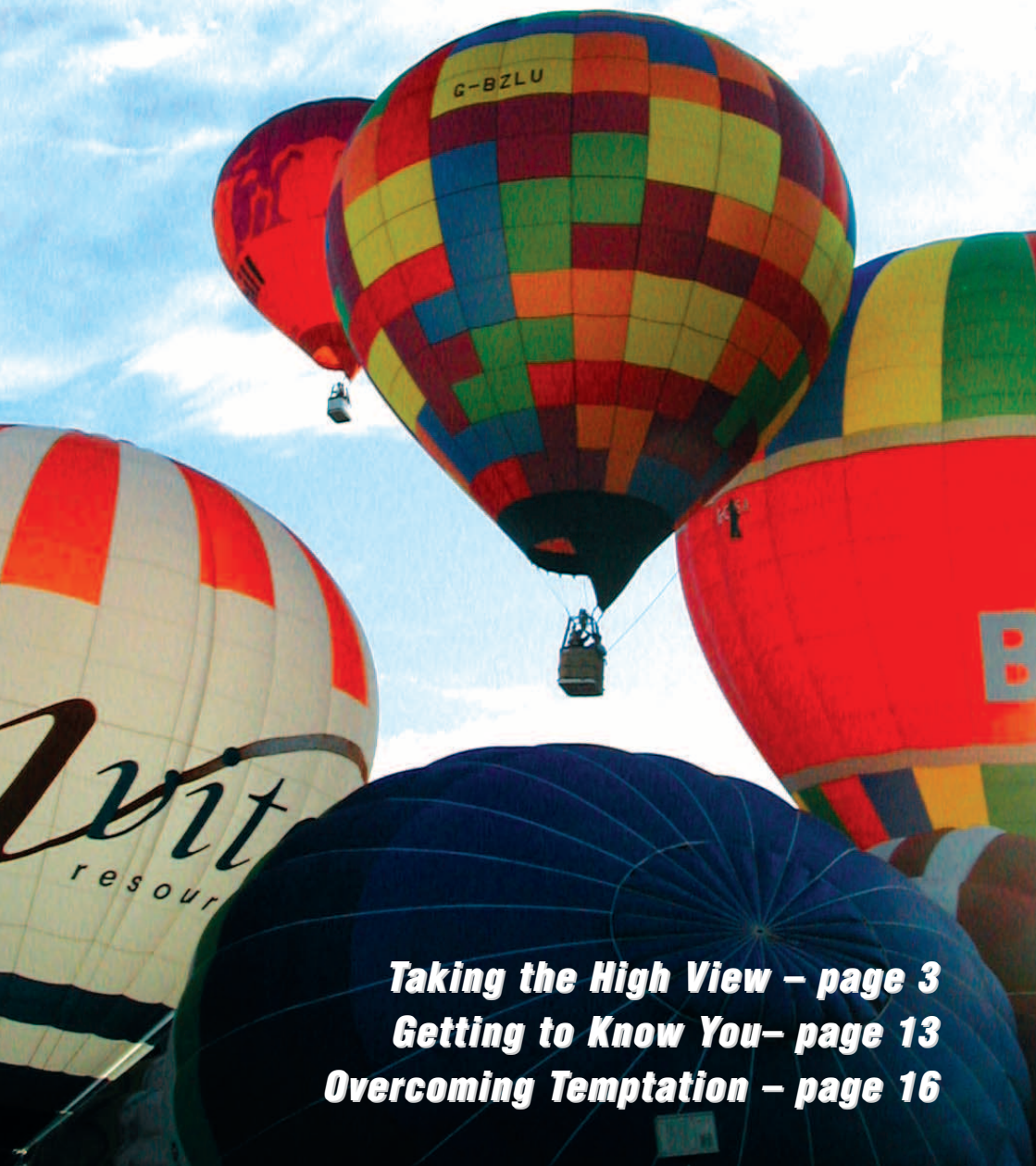


# Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1481



***Taking the High View – page 3***  
***Getting to Know You– page 13***  
***Overcoming Temptation – page 16***

# Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

123rd Year

K07

1481

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.

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**United Kingdom** – Cilla Palmer (Mrs), "Highlands", 78 Mildenhall Road, Fordham, Ely, Cambs, England CB7 5NR Tel: (01638) 723959 (24hrs & Fax) cilla@gladtidings.fsnet.co.uk

**Australia** – K.G. Quixley, 22 Narallah Grove, Box Hill North, Victoria, Australia, 3129 gladtidings@optusnet.com.au

**Canada** – Vivian Thorp (Mrs), 5377 Birdcage Walk, Burlington, Ontario, Canada, L7L 3K5

**New Zealand** – Neil Todd, 14 Morpeth Place, Blockhouse Bay, Auckland 7, New Zealand

**South Africa** – A. J. Oosthuizen, P.O. Box 50357, Musgrave Road, Durban 4062, South Africa antoost@mweb.co.za

**U.S.A.** – Pat Hemingway (Mrs), 3079 Kilburn West, Rochester Hills, MI 48306, USA.

**Other Countries** – Geoff Maycock, 8 Hale End, Bracknell, Berks., England, RG12 9YH gmaycock@fish.co.uk

**Local information is also available from:**

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**India** – T. Galbraith, G.P.O. Box 159, Hyderabad 500001, India

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**Editor:** Owen Tecwyn Morgan

26 The Crescent, Hampton-in-Arden, Solihull, B92 0BP, England, UK glad.tidings@virgin.net

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# Taking the High View

**Do you ever feel the need to get away from it all and look beyond the problems that confront you every day? That's why a lot of people go on holiday, and why many others read fiction or watch films - "To escape from the experiences of everyday life".**

## New Vistas

There's a lot to be said for getting a different perspective on life. In ancient times, army commanders would find high ground where they could see what was happening and direct operations accordingly. They needed an overview of the battle. Nowadays much of that can be achieved by satellite technology and unmanned drones, which act as 'spies in the sky'. But the idea is the same. You need to see what is happening from above if you are not going to get entangled in the detail of what is happening right next to you.

Yet, if you have ever looked at the earth from above, out of the window of a plane, or from the basket of a hot air balloon, you will know that things look very different from that angle. You may be passing over a spot with which you are quite familiar, perhaps a place near to where you live, but it can be hard to work out where you are, even so. You have to search for old landmarks and begin to find your way around from a very different angle.



## Heavenly Viewpoint

It's just like that when we try to see our lives from God's point of view. He takes a very different attitude to things like sin and righteousness. This is how God describes His position:

*"Thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: 'I dwell in the high and holy place...'" (Isaiah 57:15).*

This is not a spatial statement; God is not saying that he is up there above the clouds somewhere, looking down. It is a statement about God's attitude to sin and sinners. As we might say, 'He is above all that' and exists in a sphere of absolute holiness and complete perfection. And His understanding is highly exalted as well: He is far above our level of competence and perception:

*"My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways," says the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8,9).*

God is the Almighty and His knowledge is way beyond our grasp or comprehension, a truth that godless men and women find difficult to fathom. Whilst they try to prove that God does not exist, He remains untouched and untouchable, because that's the God He is.

## Reaching Out

A hot air balloon will have to descend

in time, perhaps miles away from the take-off site. Atmospheric conditions might have changed; it runs out of gas; or the balloonists just need to come down to resume life on earth. That way we get to see them again, and talk to them about their new experience. But how do we get to know about God; His attitude towards our lives on earth; His understanding of where everything is going, and how it will work out for the best?

The prophet Isaiah, who explained earlier how far above our world God really is, goes on in both those quotations to tell us how we can bridge the distance that separates mankind from his Maker. God's thoughts indeed are far above ours, but, says Isaiah:

*"As the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it" (55:10,11).*

Just as rain and snow come from above, so God's Word – the Bible – is the living link between God and mankind. We do not need to go up into heaven: God has reached down to instruct and inform us. But not everybody wants to be informed. It is all a question of our attitude and our desire to know what God wants of us, and how He is willing to share our lives and work with us, to help us through life's experiences. Here's Isaiah again:

*"Thus says the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: 'I dwell in the high and holy place', with him who has a contrite and*

***humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones" (Isaiah 57:15).***

If we have the right attitude of mind – a right spirit – we can understand God's Word and be instructed and informed by it. It can change our lives and help us to a better life. We can be informed about God's purpose; motivated to do the things that please Him; and come to feel better about both the happy and the sad things that happen.

## **Life with God**

God is offering to share our life and to be part of it. This means that if we are willing to live in a way that pleases Him, we can be happier now and have a real and living hope for the future. Christian baptism is a burial in water that begins a new life in Christ. It is an act designed to show that we are ending our old life (as though it was being drowned or buried) and beginning a new one (as though we had been raised from the dead).

The life we then begin to live – life with God – is the sort of life that will continue in the Kingdom of God, when Jesus returns to reign as King. This is how one believer explained the change that had happened in his life, and it could happen for us, too:

*"If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory" (Colossians 3:1-4).*

**Editor**

# What Christadelphians Believe About Death

**A cemetery is not filled with happy, bustling people, and few of us want to stay there for long. It doesn't speak of hope, but usually bears silent testimony to those who lie there.**

If we walk around quietly, the inscriptions tell of broken hearts and aspirations that had been dashed. Some gravestones speak of the loved one resting in the arms of Jesus, or gone to a much better place. We leave, knowing that, in the prevailing order of things, the time will come for each of us to be sealed in mother earth. It's a sobering thought.



## Is That All?

If that is all there is to life, then the future seems grim. Death will come to every door. What a dismal prospect! But there is a Book – only one such Book in the whole world – that removes all sorrow and points forward to a thrilling and brilliant future. And the Bible does that by explaining what has gone wrong and why we are all in a situation where we need to do something about it, if we don't want to cease to exist for evermore.

The Bible opens by explaining that Adam and Eve once lived in a wonder-

ful Paradise on earth – in a Garden eastward in Eden. Tragically, they chose to disobey God, and their sin brought death into the world (Romans 5:12). All Adam's descendants are sinners too, because we choose to be, and therefore the sentence that was passed long ago catches us up too. For God is always faithful to His Word, and it remains the case that:

*“The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself” (Ezekiel 18:20).*

## What Then?

What happens when our life ceases? Again the Bible is explicit and tells us that, whether we are rich or poor, we go to the grave. The righteous and the wicked all lie down together. David grieved about that. He was not afraid to die, but was saddened that when that happened no praise could be offered to the God he loved. He gave no hint of going to his reward at death, but sees it as a sleep from which there would one day be an awakening. He states this hope so simply, yet so powerfully:

*“As for me, I will see your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I*

awake in your likeness” (Psalm 17:15).

Suddenly, in all its glory, the hope of Scripture is before us. When we die we fall asleep, in the unconsciousness of death. Sleep is such a gentle word and helps to remove any worries we might otherwise have. But the true Bible hope of life after death is of awakening from that sleep by resurrection, to a new life in the Kingdom of God.

## Not for Everyone

Once you understand that basic teaching about life and death – the true meaning of mortality and the realisation that the idea of an immortal soul is a pagan myth, not Bible teaching – things become a lot clearer. Some people will sleep forever and never wake up; their life will have ended completely. Not for them the opportunity of living forever in a perfect world. They didn’t want it, so they won’t get it. But others will awake and have the opportunity of living again:

*“Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever” (Daniel 12:2,3).*

So, what must we do if we are to have that wonderful opportunity of living forever with God? Daniel says that we must be “wise” and the Lord Jesus adds another important requirement:

*“This is the will of him who sent me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last*

*day” (John 6:40).*

Here we have a categorical assurance that those who know Jesus and who believe in him will be awakened at a set time called ‘the last day’. The apostle Paul explains just what it means to have a relationship with God through Christ when he adds that: *“the dead in Christ will rise first”*, whilst explaining that all that will happen with

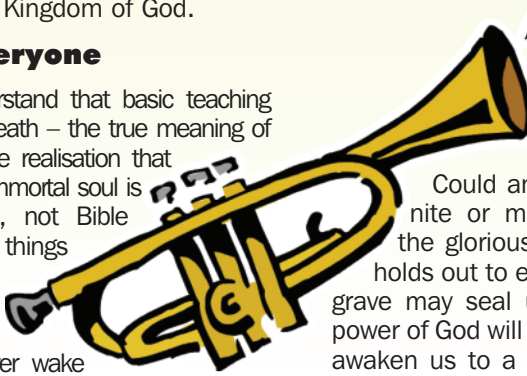
*“a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God” (1 Thesalonians 4:16).*

Could anything be more definite or more exciting? This is the glorious news that the Bible holds out to every truth seeker. The grave may seal us in death, but the power of God will smash its bonds, and awaken us to a glorious life for evermore. We will reign with Christ on earth, for he promised, *“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5).*

## Jesus makes it Possible

The Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, was *“made in all points like unto his brethren” (Hebrews 2:14)*. Therefore he must have been mortal and, like all mankind, he died. Yet death was the punishment for sinners and before the Father he was blameless. Therefore the grave could not hold him (Acts 2:24). He had said that he would rise. It was either a boast or it was the truth, and there is no other way that we can consider such a powerful claim. It was the truth!

The gospel writer, Luke, describes an occasion when some people stood in a cemetery a long time ago. They were women who had gone to anoint the Lord’s body, which had been hastily left



in a rich man's tomb, pending the final anointing. But they were utterly at a loss, for there was no body in the tomb for them to prepare for its final interment. Instead there were angels present to tell them the glad tidings:



*“He is not here, but is risen! Remember how he spoke to you when he was still in Galilee, saying, ‘The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again’”. And they remembered his words” (Luke 24:6-8).*

What a thrilling message that was. It stimulated those faithful women to hurry to tell the disciples, and we know that as that infectious joy stirred their hearts, so the happiness spread across the Roman Empire. Thousands of seeking souls were spurred to accept the Christian gospel, despite many hardships and savage persecutions. That same invitation has come ringing down to us. There is not a shadow of doubt that, if we die, the day will come when the ancient graves will be stirred, and we WILL be called forth, and by grace shall stand in glory.

## **Resurrection Chapter**

How appropriate therefore it is that 1 Corinthians chapter 15 should be read at so many funerals, for it gives the most vivid hope to perishing mankind, the hope of resurrection from the dead at the Coming of Jesus Christ:

*“Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be*

*changed – in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality,*

*then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory” (1 Corinthians 15:51-54).*

It is such heart warming news. Death's bands will be smashed, as they were with the Saviour. Therefore, with superlative confidence, the apostle continues:

*“Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labour is not in vain in the Lord” (15:57,58).*

He is counselling us that if we know these marvellous things, we should do what we can to spread the good news: that the grave has been conquered. It remains for us to ask whether we will be foolish, like Adam, or endeavour to follow the example of our Lord and Saviour, the One who is to return as Lord of all when the divine plan of the ages is brought to fruition.

**Ken Clark**

# A History of Christianity

*This second article shows how established Christianity developed many of its present ideas, which are not always what the Bible teaches. When Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, in the time of the Emperor Constantine, things changed drastically. Views that had been common in the pagan world crept in to distort the true Christian message, as **Trevor Pritchard** now explains.*

## Definition

It was during the first five centuries of this present era that the church was forced to define its beliefs in theological terms. Great councils to determine these matters were held at Nicaea in Bithynia (now in Turkey) in 325 AD, where the Nicene Creed took shape and the unsound Doctrine of the Trinity was formulated. Greek and Latin theologians met together and the result was a doctrine which is not taught in the Bible. Here is an account from “*The World’s Religions*” by Ninian Smart:

*“The Christian faith had found itself in a strange position in regard to Jesus. From both the practical and the theoretical point of view it wanted to affirm the divinity of Christ; but it was, after all, a movement which had come out of Jewish tradition. It had suffered persecution because of its unwillingness to compromise with pagan polytheism. It was firmly committed to belief in one God. From the practical angle, it was involved in a central ritual, the Eucharist, which involved the worship of Christ. It was blasphemous to worship anyone except God; so Christ must be God.*

*This was the practical part of their affirmation of Jesus’ divinity. But theoretically too they needed the idea. Christ died for our sins, in a state of solidarity with humanity, with human beings. He expiated our sins. So he must have been one of us. But as Saviour he must be divine, because it was blasphemous to hold that anyone but God could put away sins. So from the perspective of the doctrine of salvation too, Christ had to be divine, though human at the same time.*

*All this generated the search for formulae which would deal with these problems: a formula which would make it plain that the Christian was not committed to worshipping two or more gods, but only one God; and a formula which would make sense of the two natures (human and divine) of the selfsame person ... These issues came to be debated at various Ecumenical Councils, of which seven are recognized usually as canonical Councils, from Nicaea in 325 to Constantinople in the 9th century. The resulting formulations did not always work, for they occasioned splits in the church often enough, and led sometimes to mutual charges of heresy. The history of doctrinal definition has not been a very happy one. That can be said over and over again! There were great strivings among Christian centres for supremacy, notably in Rome, Constantinople and, to a lesser extent, Alexandria. Eventually Rome imposed its authority over the church through its vast organisation of cardinals, bishops and clergy.”*



## Later Developments

King Charlemagne was the ruler of the Franks but when they conquered Italy in about 800 AD a form of the old Roman Empire was re-established. The whole system of feudalism was instituted to form a social order under the guidance of the church. The marriage of church and state was complete in that the monarchs of Europe had to swear their allegiance to the Pope of Rome, for they considered him to be God's representative on earth.

It was in 1054 that something known as the "Great Schism" took place and the church divided into two parts – East and West. This split had been developing over many years. The Eastern Church had its centre in Constantinople and was described as the "Orthodox Church" in that it continued to make its decisions through church councils. The Western church had its centre in Rome and all its decisions were made by one man – the Pope. The split finally took place because the Pope wanted the eastern churches to owe their allegiance to him.

However, as the years went by, particularly after the Crusades (1096-1291AD), this Roman church became so corrupt that many men of note rebelled against its avarice, cruelty (particularly the Inquisition), and its evident corruption amongst its hierarchy.

This is what Bamber Gascoigne says in his book "The Christians":

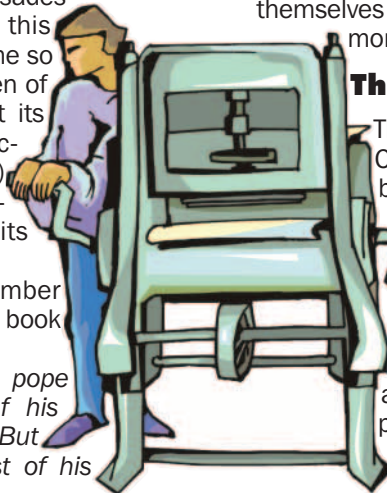
*"Sixtus IV was the pope who made seven of his nephews cardinals. But if he made the most of his*

*own chances, he could also sympathize with the problems of others. The young Caesar Borgia had difficulties in becoming a priest because he was illegitimate. When the case was presented to Sixtus, he decided that normal rules need not apply – because at least Caesar's mother had been a married woman, and his father was a cardinal. The cardinal who was Caesar's father also became pope, as Alexander VI. He had at least four children before he became pope – and possibly as many as three more after receiving the papal crown ... His daughter Lucrezia owes her ill fame largely to the succession of marriages forced upon her by the pope to suit his own political ends. But the popes were not alone in making much of their children. A Council of 1512 ordered that priests should at least refrain from turning up at the marriages of their sons and daughters".*

In their search for holiness and separateness from this corrupt worldly organisation, many individual Christians from both churches shut themselves off from this life by becoming monks and nuns and formed themselves into communities living in monasteries.

## The Printing Press

The next great change in the Church was brought about by a mechanical invention, said to be the greatest invention of the past 1000 years. Towards the end of the 15th century, William Caxton in England and others abroad designed and built printing presses. This revolutionised man's search for knowledge.



The mystery of foreign languages was dispelled. Latin and Greek were no longer the preserves of the church alone. Ordinary men and women began to learn to read for themselves in their own language and the Renaissance period was born. This period of man's history began towards the end of the 14th century and continued until the end of the 17th century. It was at this time that the Bible was translated into the everyday speech of men and women in many countries. Such men as William Tyndale (16th century) and, before him, Wycliffe in the 14th century devoted their whole lives in their determination to bring the Bible to the common man.

So, soon after the invention of printing, there was a very real attempt by serious men to reform the Roman Church from inside. It had become so corrupt in its practices and administration that people like Martin Luther (1517), Zwingli and John Calvin (1541) made very outspoken attacks on the establishment of the church. During the next two centuries there grew up, mainly in Europe, a whole new wing of the church called the Protestant Church which "protested" against the beliefs and practices of the Roman Church.

As the European powers gradually colonized the rest of the world, missionaries took conflicting gospels to the peoples of the world in Asia, India and Africa. By the time we reach the 18th century, we see a great revival of interest in the Bible in this country.

The next century saw the questioning of fundamental beliefs held by the church and man himself became the centre of his thoughts. The seeds of humanism were sown and the Bible declined as a source of authority in matters of ethics and moral behaviour.

Of the rest you are only too well aware. Yet the Bible itself told us about this history of the community of believers well before that history which we have sketched began.

## **No Surprise!**

In one of the parables of Jesus (see Matthew 13:24-30) he tells us this story and explains its meaning. A man sowed wheat in his field but at night his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat. When the crop grew the wheat and weeds were intermingled and you could not pull out the weeds without damaging the wheat. Both were left to grow together until, at harvest time they could safely be separated.

The Lord Jesus explained (13:41-43) that this meant that a false system of belief would grow up alongside that of true believers, which would only be shown to be false when he returns from heaven. He repeats the message in the last book of the New Testament (see Revelation 11:15-18).

We encourage all our readers to read the Bible prayerfully for yourselves, learn the true message of Christ from its pages and prepare yourself for the day of His return to this sad and war-torn world. Only then will there be peace and prosperity for mankind (Isaiah 32:15-18).

**Trevor Pritchard**

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# A Faithful God

## **The Bible emphasises that the Word of God is far more than the written word contained in our Bibles.**

Genesis Chapter One illustrates the point: “God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light” (1:3). He spoke and it was done. God uttered His voice and it came to pass. His Word contained a power to perform that which was spoken. The Psalmist reflects on this profound truth in Psalm 33, when he said:

*“For the word of the LORD is right, and all his work is done in truth ... By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, And all the host of them by the breath of his mouth ... Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him. For he spoke, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast” (Psalm 33:4-9).*

The logic of the Psalmist is noteworthy. There is no distinction between the divine fiat in Creation and the Word of God spoken or written to instruct men on other occasions. Because God’s Word is right, nothing can withstand it, and all His works are done in truth. Because there is power to perform, nothing can frustrate or thwart God’s purpose revealed through His Word. That Word will always be fulfilled and God is thus shown to be faithful in all His ways.

## **Revelation**

There are occasions, as at Creation, when God speaks and it is done immediately. There are, however, other occasions when God reveals His counsel to men and then asks them to exercise faith, by waiting patiently for Him to fulfil His words. Yet, reasons the Psalmist, the record of Creation is the assurance to us of the power of His Word, both in the natural world and in the moral and intellectual spheres. For, he says:

*“The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations” (33:11).*

Thus it is that, throughout the Scriptures, God calls mankind’s attention to His faithfulness in the natural world, so that

we can be assured of the certainty of His promises and the abiding worth of His Word of truth. As the Psalmist says:

*“Forever, O LORD, your word is settled in heaven. Your faithfulness endures to all generations; you established the earth, and it abides. They continue this day according to your ordinances, For all are your servants. Unless your law had been my delight, I would then have perished in my affliction. I will never forget your precepts, for by them you have given me life” (Ps. 119:89-93).*

And the Prophet adds a parallel



drawn from the natural world:

*“For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it” (Isaiah 55:10,11).*

The world that God created is often used as a basis for assurances about the nature of God’s purpose and promises. Take the way that everything happens with such consistency, day after day and month after month. The prophet Jeremiah sees that as an expression of God’s faithfulness and dependability for, he says:

*“Thus says the LORD, who gives the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and the stars for a light by night, who disturbs the sea, and its waves roar (the LORD of hosts is his name): ‘If those ordinances depart from before me,’ says the LORD, ‘Then the seed of Israel shall also cease from being a nation before me forever’” (Jeremiah 31:35,36).*

The material world, the witness of creation, the sun, the moon and the stars in their courses, seedtime and harvest, day and night and all the other unchanging and recurring events that make life possible, are a testimony to us of the reliability of God’s Word. We can be as confident that God will fulfil His promises as we are sure that the sun will rise tomorrow.

## **Christ is Coming**

These principles, developed from the Genesis record of Creation, can be seen in another Scriptural context that

is relevant to the days in which we live. In his Second Epistle (Chapter 3) the apostle Peter speaks of scoffers who will mock and deride those Scriptures which speak of the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. He speaks with deep irony, for the scoffers will point to the very ordinances that declare the faithfulness of God and scornfully challenge those promises:

*“...saying, ‘Where is the promise of his coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation’” (3:4).*

There is a sublime irony about this for these willing sinners had deliberately chosen to ignore the record of divine history, as Peter now points out for:

*“This they wilfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water. But the heavens and the earth which now exist are kept in store by the same word, reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men” (3:5-7).*

Note the progression of thought:

- ➡ It was by the Word of the Lord that the heavens and the earth were created in the beginning;
- ➡ It was by that same Word that the world perished in the flood and
- ➡ It is by the same Word that the present order of things – in which God is generally ignored, and the Second Coming of His Son mocked – is kept in store against the judgment of that great day.

**Dudley Fifield**

# Getting To Know You



**One way of becoming familiar with a person is to see them in their own surroundings. To an extent we can do this with the Lord Jesus, but we need to add a word of warning.**

Observation is no substitute for direct contact. When, using the pages of Scripture, we observe what the Lord was like in his native surroundings, we are not, of course, meeting him “face to face”. That time will come for those who are privileged to be present when he comes back to the earth in glory.

## With His Disciples

Let's take a typical passage from the gospel, in this case from Chapter 5 of Luke's account, and see Jesus at work. He has been preaching in the synagogues of Galilee and, it seems, so many people wanted to hear him that Jesus moved outside and went beside the lake where there was plenty of open space.

However, he was sharing the space with some fishermen who were cleaning their nets and no doubt preparing them for another night's fishing. In the hope of making it easier for all to hear without being unduly crushed in the crowd Jesus took to a boat and taught from the lake.

Having ended his teaching Jesus said to one of the fishermen, named Simon:

*“Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch” (5:4).*

It must have seemed a curious request, almost impertinent, and

Simon had every reason for saying “No thanks”. They had been out all night fishing and it had been totally unproductive. Now they needed the time to prepare for the next night's fishing and, anyway, what did this wandering preacher know about fishing; wasn't he a carpenter by trade? His response, however, was: *“At your word I will let down the nets”*.

There was no arguing; just a simple acceptance of the Master's word and he did as he was asked. That is a real challenge to us as well. Do we simply accept what we are told by the Master? Or do we spend more time arguing about whether he really said it or not and whether he really meant what he said. And do we then follow what Jesus has asked with simple obedience? At the word of the Master they let down the nets.

## Miraculous Catch

They were successful beyond their wildest dreams.

*“They enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking. They signalled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, ‘Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord’” (5:6-8).*

Would you have reacted like that? Simon was a hard-bitten fisherman. Never in his life had he seen such a catch – all at the word of a wandering preacher! So he fell to his knees in amazement, and note well what he

said: “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord”

This man of the sea dramatically proclaims that he is no fit company for the Lord Jesus. In his comment he recognises two important things:

- Jesus had a remarkable power over and beyond the forces of nature;
- To have such power Jesus must also have had a life beside which Simon Peter’s appeared shoddy and weak. The life of the Lord Jesus was blameless, and Peter was a sinner.

## Man Apart

We are told that when Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist there was a sign from heaven that he was God’s beloved Son:

*“The heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased” (Luke 3:21,22).*

Later the apostle John records this saying of Jesus:

*“For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure. The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand” (John 3:34,35).*

Notice the two things that go together: a life which is well-pleasing to God and the gift of the power of God, the Holy Spirit, to use as an expression of God’s love.

Jesus was a man apart, as Peter had



recognised, and now he issued a life-changing invitation to them:

*“Jesus said to Simon, ‘Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men.’ And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him”. (5:10,11).*

Far from going away from Jesus, Peter and the other disciples were going to spend the rest of their lives both listening to Jesus and speaking of him to other men and women. In their turn they would respond to the message which comes from the Master’s lips. You and I could be part of their greater catch and be found sharing the message Jesus spoke to other people.

## Jesus and the Leper

Shortly after these events Jesus was confronted by a leper. As we might say today, “full blown” leprosy was a dreadful disease. People were really afraid of it and the sufferer was an outcast having been instructed to cry out, “Unclean! Unclean!” whenever he or she came near to human habitation. Throughout Scripture this disease has been used to picture the way in which sin has spoiled human life and made us outcasts from God. This is what we are now told:

“While he was in one of the cities, there came a man full of leprosy. And when he saw Jesus, he fell on his face and begged him, “Lord, if you will, you can make me clean” (5:12).

Notice what the man said: he asked to be “made clean” rather than asking to be “healed”. His words match what he had been calling out to passers by.

He wanted to be “Clean” (not “Unclean!”). And that fits in perfectly with the thought that humanity is unclean (full of sin) before God; we all require cleansing (forgiveness); for we, too, are in need of God’s mercy.

*“Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, “I will; be clean.” And immediately the leprosy left him” (5:13).*

## Jesus Reaches Out

Jesus was completely unfazed. He displayed no fear of contamination, but reached out and touched the man. In that moment the leper received not only cleansing but acceptance by the Lord. His relationships with human society were also renewed. Notice that this man already trusted that the Lord Jesus could deal with his condition, if only he would. And Jesus certainly would. The cleansing was however incomplete, so Jesus:

*“...charged him to tell no one, but “go and show yourself to the priest, and make an offering for your cleansing, as Moses commanded, for a proof to them” (5:14).*

Notice how, once again, Jesus confirms what is written in the Old Testament. That Law must be observed. But we need to remind ourselves that Jesus said this to a Jew and it was with regard to a literal cleansing of leprosy. What might he say to us?

Surely it would be something like this:

*“Just as you have seen this man*

*cleansed, so you too need your sins forgiven. And when that is done, just as for the leper life can never be the same again, you must go and witness to the forgiveness you have received so that others realise that I can meet their needs too.”*

Jesus instructed the man not to tell anyone about the healing. He had come to preach the gospel and the work of healing could easily get in the way of that: people might be more interested in what he could do, rather than what he had to say. And that is what happened, for the news got out anyway:

*“The report about him went abroad, and great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities. But he would withdraw to desolate places and pray” (5:15,16).*

They were just like people today who want to ‘be there and see the action’. But Jesus was more than a miracle worker; more even than a venerable teacher, important though that was. He was the Heir Apparent of God’s kingdom and, also above all else, he was their God-appointed Saviour.

Through him people everywhere have the opportunity to have their sins forgiven and receive the hope of the gospel. As we listen to him, by learning from the Gospels, we too need to keep in balance what we really require. In calm contemplation we need to find our Saviour.

## David Nightingale

*Quotations from the English Standard Version of the Bible*

# Overcoming Temptation

**The word “temptation” has been trivialised. Offer a chocolate to a fashion-conscious lady – she will take one at the same time saying, “You really shouldn’t tempt me.” There is even a perfume called “Temptation”.**

But it’s not a trivial matter: not at all! Being tempted is serious stuff and giving way to temptation can be deadly.

This is what the Bible says about temptation:

*“A person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin; and sin ... brings forth death” (James 1:14-15 RSV).*

Notice the sequence:

- ❶ Desire
- ❷ Temptation
- ❸ Sin
- ❹ Death.

## Eve’s Experience

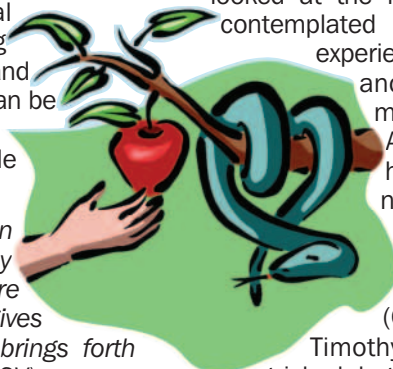
When Eve was tempted there was much more involved than just fruit. The tree in question wasn’t a mere fruit tree; it was a special tree – “the tree of knowledge” and taking the fruit gave her a new experience. By doing what God had forbidden, Eve and then Adam got experience of what it was like to break the law of God. Humans still crave for “knowledge”; they are always in search of a new “experience.”

- ⇨ Fortunes are spent on space research because we want to “know”.
- ⇨ Youngsters dabble with drugs because they want an “experience”.

Eve was no different and as she looked at the fruit, she might have contemplated what “mind-blowing” experience she might enjoy and what limitations might be blown away.

At least she would have done if she had not believed the serpent that God hadn’t really meant what He said (Genesis 3:4,5; 1 Timothy 2:14). She was tricked, but the outcome was the same. Step by step she stumbled into disobedience by breaking the law of God and, like so many others since, she discovered that she had become enslaved to sin, with no way out. Sin resulted in death.

Had Adam and Eve been wise, they would have gone a long way away from that particular tree and should have tried to put it out of mind, whatever the serpent might have said. But they didn’t and both the tree and the serpent were there with the alluring and enticing possibilities of a new experience. It seemed certain that, sooner or later, the pair would stumble, step by step, into the abyss. And the Genesis account gives the impression that Eve and the serpent had conversed about the tree on more than one occasion (see Genesis 3:1).





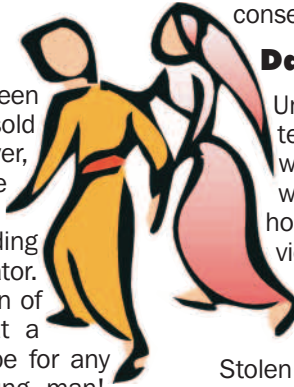
## Joseph's Experience

Joseph was only seventeen years old when he was sold to the Egyptians. However, he proved himself to be utterly reliable and trustworthy and had outstanding skills as an administrator. He came to the attention of his master's wife. What a temptation that would be for any lonely, red-blooded young man! Yet see how resolutely Joseph dealt with the situation – the woman's advances were firmly rejected as he made these two statements:

- 1 My master has placed absolute confidence in me; your suggestion would be a wicked betrayal of that confidence;
- 2 It would be a sin against God.

When Potiphar's wife persisted, we read that Joseph refused to listen to her or to remain in her presence (see Genesis 39:10-18). What a tremendous example! It would have been so easy to justify compliance with the suggestion; did not Joseph belong to Potiphar and was he not therefore at the wife's disposal too?

What vengeance might be taken against him if he refused? (In fact terrible vengeance was taken and Joseph had to bear it.) Joseph might have been tempted to "dabble" with the temptation without actually committing adultery - 'the twilight world of sins not quite committed' as one writer has described this sort of situation. But Joseph did nothing of the kind – the temptation was firmly and resolutely rejected and the



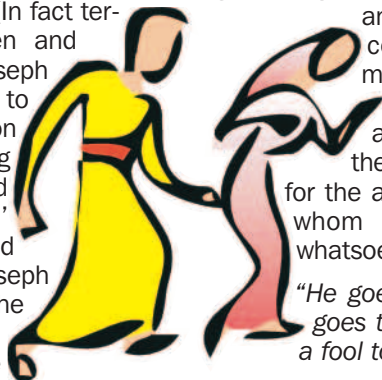
consequences were endured.

## David's Experience

Unlike Joseph, David dabbled with temptation. He found himself with time on his hands and he went up onto the roof of his house – a vantage point that provided views into other people's homes. Why did he go there? Did he hope that perchance he might see something titillating? Stolen waters are certainly sweet. The sorry account is too well known and everyone knows how this man of God, a man described as being "after God's own heart", plunged into a disastrous sequence of events the consequences of which dogged him to his grave. Had David been busy he would not have had time on his hands in the first place – and there is a lesson for us.

## Young Man's Experience

Solomon describes a "... young man, void of understanding" who dabbled with temptation (Proverbs 7:6-23). There was a house of ill-repute and a wise young man would have given the place a wide berth! But the young man in the story found his feet being pulled in the direction of the house as if by a magnet. He waited for dusk and as he edged along the road it became dark and darkness provides cover for folly. He moved towards the corner of the street and he drifted along the street, a ready prey for the alluring seductress for whom he was no match whatsoever. The writer says, "He goes after her as an ox goes to the slaughter or as a fool to the stocks till a dart



strike through his liver ...” (7:22,23).

Again the big lesson is to nip temptation in the bud with resolution and firmness. Dabbling with temptation is a sure road to burnt fingers.

## The Experience of Judas

Judas was addicted to money and the craving of an addict can never be satisfied. Why he became a disciple is a mystery – perhaps he hoped that Jesus would spearhead an attack on the Romans and if so, then he, Judas, might have something to gain. It is significant that Jesus appointed him as treasurer for the group thus putting Judas’ weakness to the test. Judas began in a small way, putting his fingers into the common purse; but he hoped for bigger things and was diverting money given for the poor into his own pocket.

Perhaps he became exasperated that the longed-for push to drive out the Romans was so long in coming and so he looked for a short cut. The desperation of the Pharisees to eliminate Jesus was well known and Judas saw his chance. The 30 pieces of silver was a mere down payment – a much bigger sum would follow when the deed was successfully accomplished.

Jesus knew exactly what was happening and he warned Judas several times hoping that the man might turn back but warnings went unheeded and so the final word was in the Upper Room as Judas moved towards the door, “*What you are going to do, do quickly*” (John 13:27). Thus did Judas betray the Son of God for money and the ultimate irony is that he used a



kiss – a token of love – to identify the wanted man.

What do we learn from Judas? That conscience can be suppressed and if it is repeatedly suppressed then, like a muscle that is never used, it will waste away.

Paul wrote of individuals whose conscience had been seared as with a hot iron. The lesson therefore is this – God has blessed us with a mechanism which can warn us when we are stepping dangerously close to the mark and an active conscience governed by the teaching of Scripture is a valuable part of a Christian’s life. But if we repeatedly overrule the pricks of conscience, eventually it will wither away, and we will drift into spiritual catastrophe.

## The Experience of Jesus

Jesus “... in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). Because Jesus had to struggle against temptation he is very sympathetic with us in our struggles. His were far more severe than the temptations that arise in our lives.

None of us has been tempted to miraculously provide for all our needs by the abuse of God’s power; none of us has been tempted to win the adulation of the masses by presumption on Divine protection, and none of us has been tempted to seize absolute power over the nations.

Our temptations are much more modest – perhaps we serve our fellowmen yet hoping that our ‘good works’ will be noticed and win praise from others; perhaps we seek authority within our church group or in our daily work – authority because we want the feeling of power over others.

How did Jesus vanquish temptation?

- ◆ His desire to serve his Father was stronger than his desire for self gratification and,
- ◆ That desire to serve his Father was reinforced by a profound knowledge of the Scriptures and the ability to meet each temptation with a powerful, relevant Bible quotation. His conscience was extremely acute and active.

## The Teaching of Jesus

Jesus advocates radical surgery! *“If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away ...”* (Matthew 5:29). What does he mean by this? Perhaps Jesus is saying something like this: ‘If something in your life is coming between you and God, eradicate it altogether, compromise will never succeed’. So how can that work in practice? Here are a few practical examples:

Suppose you find certain television programmes to be very alluring and yet in your heart you know that you will be defiled by watching them – arrange to

be out of the house on the evenings when those programmes are on; the temptation then to ‘switch on’ will not arise. More drastic still, perhaps, take your television set to the local car boot sale!

Or suppose that you find crossword puzzles to be irresistible and that the Lord’s work is being skimped because hours are being soaked up by what has become an addiction. Resolve not to buy the publications concerned and thus avoid the temptation; if the puzzle is sitting there under the nose then the decision to spend “no more than ten minutes” is futile because we know that the ten will be multiplied many times over; more drastic action is required.

Perhaps we find that friends are pulling us away from the right path; the answer is to seek other friends who share our ideals.

The final word must be, *“Seek first of all the Kingdom of God and His righteousness.”* If that is our priority then other matters will fall into place.

**David Budden**

## Don't throw that Stone!

If we centred our minds on the faults that we have  
We would not be as quick to condemn,  
For the men who were told to cast the first stone  
All went out, and they left the woman alone;  
Would we want to be numbered with *them*?

So, cast not a stone, for it's sure to rebound,  
Which in three ways can cause us much pain:  
The first is the hurt that we do to our health,  
And then its the pain caused to some other self,  
And third, it's not pleasing to our God Himself;  
Let's think twice lest we do it again!

**Peggy Rawson**



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