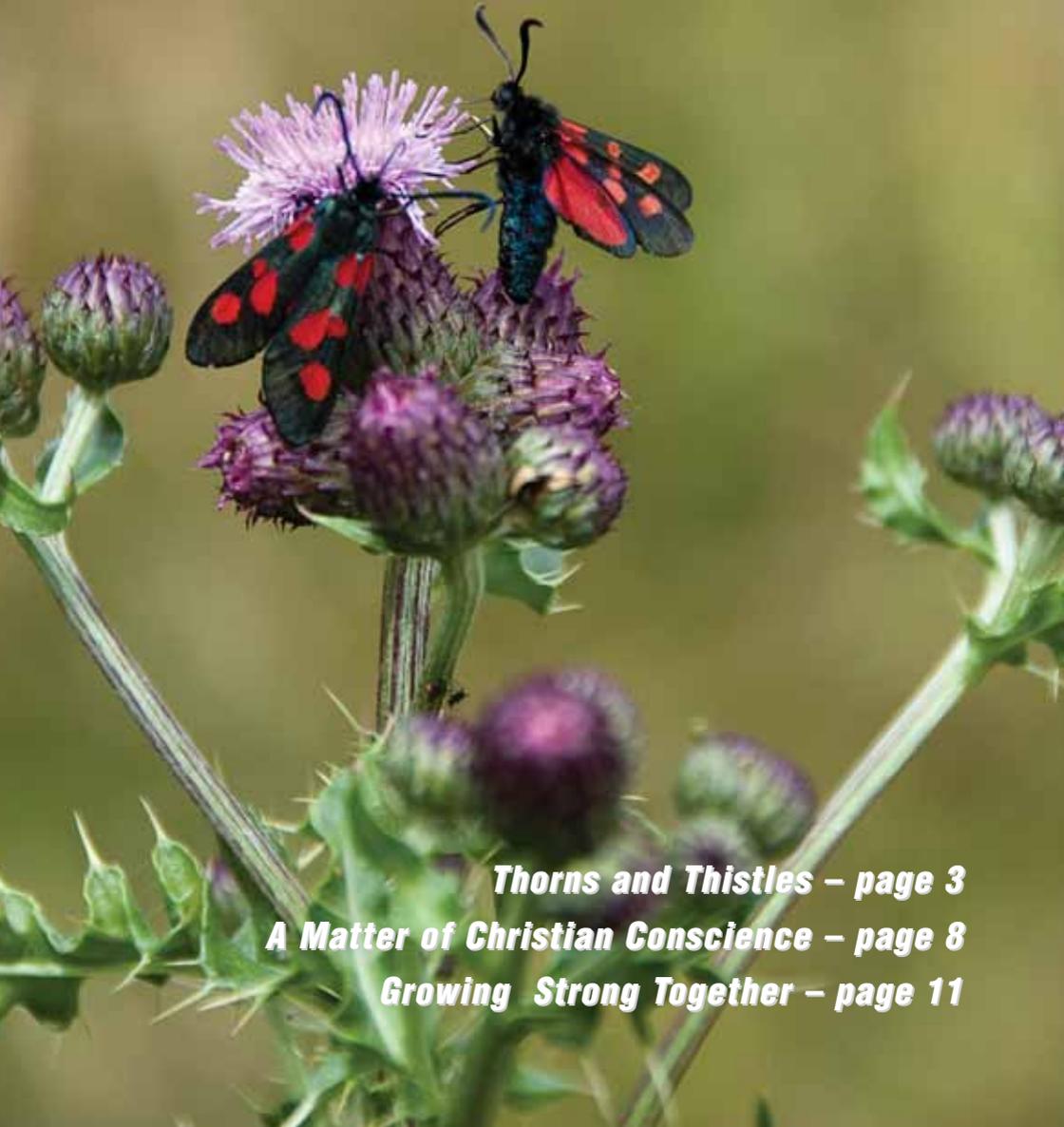


Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1516



Thorns and Thistles – page 3
A Matter of Christian Conscience – page 8
Growing Strong Together – page 11

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OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

124th Year

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1516



A monthly magazine published by the Christadelphians (brothers and sisters in Christ) and available throughout the world.

Its objectives are – to encourage the study of the Bible as God's inspired message to mankind; 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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Contents

Thorns and Thistles....3

**Fearful Sights in these
Last Days.....5**

**A Matter of Christian
Conscience8**

God's Word Purifies ..10

**Growing Strong
Together11**

**A Catalogue of
Problems14**

**Paul's Defence before
Felix17**

Lasting Values19

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Thorns and Thistles

In its present state the world is not what God intends it to be. He made it differently and he will make it better. But for the moment things go wrong and great problems exist. Some of them are featured in this issue, not for their news value but because the Bible has an answer to all of them – yes to all of them!

Diagnosis

What is just as important is that the Bible gives an explanation of why all these troubles have come about and what we need to do about it. Remember that with the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico there was worldwide interest in the source of the leak that was causing the difficulty. For as long as oil was gushing out uncontrollably the huge clean-up operation was frustrated.

Clean a beach, or clean up a pelican, and it was only a matter of time before the beach and the bird would be polluted again. Human history is like that too. A world leader might initiate a terrible atrocity and it might get cleaned up, but for as long as he or she remained in power the same thing was liable to happen all over again.

It's the same in our own lives. We might do something that we later regret but there is always the chance that we might do the same thing or a similar thing again. And there's a reason why that can happen. We are flawed creatures with a nature which cannot be

trusted always to do what is good and fair and true. We inherit tendencies which we cannot always control. The Lord Jesus once offered an analysis of the human condition, and it doesn't make pleasant reading. Disputing with religious leaders about the need for ceremonial hand washing, Jesus said:

For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornication, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man (Matthew 15:19–20).

Root Cause

The truth of this analysis is demonstrated every day when we hear or read about horrendous things. A mother starves her daughter to death; another mother suffocates her newborn baby and then does it again and again; a teenager gets stabbed; innocent civilians are blown to pieces by a suicide bomber; a father stabs his two young children and his wife and then hangs himself.

Sadly these events have become everyday occurrences and they appear to be entirely unrelated; but there is a thread that joins them all together. The cause of all these tragic events is deep-rooted in human nature and to understand it we need to look at the early history of mankind and the best account of this is to be found in the Bible, the Word of God.



When God created the world and gave man and woman the opportunity to live in a paradise setting there was just one forbidden thing: they were not to eat of the fruit of one particular tree. Everything else was allowed; this one thing was forbidden. It was God's way of testing them to see whether or not they would be obedient. Parents often give such guidelines to their children. For example: "Don't put your hand in the fire or you'll burn" or "Don't drink from that bottle or it will poison you". This was God's way of preventing a similar happening for He knew that if mankind once broke His law, simple though it was, and got a taste for asserting their own will in place of His, they would want to do that over and over again. That is exactly how things worked out. Adam ate of the forbidden fruit in full awareness of what he was doing and because he had deliberately broken God's law, something needed to be done to bring mankind to its senses.

Thorns and Thistles

Adam's action blighted the world that God had created and lest humanity should think that their way was best and that God's way was limiting and twisted, God changed the whole environment He had created. To demonstrate that things were now seriously distorted He allowed the choice mankind had made to have its inevitable effect:

To Adam he said, "Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat of it': Cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you

shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return" (Genesis 3:17–19).

The effect of human sin is very far-reaching, as daily news bulletins make clear. But to show us that we are now far removed from the people God wants us to be, for the time being He has left us to our own devices and does not intervene to stop terrible things happening or to put things right. The apostle Paul explains His action like this:

The creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him [God] who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God (Romans 8:20–21).

At present we live in an environment which has been polluted by human disobedience. It is no wonder that there are so many futile and terrible things happening. But if we look to God and enquire about His purpose and His rescue plan we shall find out that there are better times ahead. God wants people to learn about His gracious purpose and to show their obedience – unlike Adam – by humbly submitting to His commandments. God asks us to believe His Word and to be baptized so that we can begin to follow Jesus. That won't change the environment in which we live, but it will give you something really meaningful to live for, both now and in God's new world to be established when Jesus returns.

Editor

Fearful Sightings in these Last Days

On a sunlit morning in New York on September 11, 2001, as American people went about their daily business with the vitality and the sense of purpose for which they are well known, two planes piloted by Arab terrorists dived out of the cloudless sky and crashed into the upper stories of the twin towers of the New York Trade Centre.

In no time at all they were raging infernos and, in spite of the heroic efforts of the fire-fighters, many people died, including some of the rescuers. From that moment on life in one of the great cities of the world would no longer be the same in the so-called land of the free.

What was thought to be a city with untouchable security measures had now been breached by the diabolical intentions of terrorists whose intention was to destroy and maim without mercy. They wanted to cause fear and the result of their action was that people felt much less safe than hitherto.

Shocked

The people of the United States were shocked and deeply disturbed that their country, known for its spontaneous generosity in being among the first in giving assistance to countries in trouble, had now been targeted by death-dealing terrorists who spared neither young nor old.

The lightning attack upon the twin towers, the visible symbols of American enterprise and stability, far from breaking the resolve of the people to defend themselves against such



invaders of their skies, stiffened their determination to increase their awareness of the global nature of terrorism and the measures needed in combating such insurgency.

"Fearful Sightings"

The bombings in New York and those later on London's underground railway system, in which there was another sad loss of life, both fit the description of

"*fearful sightings*" once mentioned by Jesus. He had been asked by his disciples about the signs they should look out for before his return from heaven, at the end of the age.

Jesus explained that problems would take place before his return to the earth. He emphasised just how troubled the last days would be as he warned that there will be upon the earth great earthquakes (as fairly recently in Iran, Pakistan, China and Haiti, each with great loss of life), famines, pestilences (e.g. AIDS) and "*fearful sightings*". Then he added this comment:

There will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things

which are coming on the earth, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken (Luke 21:25–26).

His reference to ‘perplexity’ (the Greek word ‘aporea’) means that people would think there was no way out, humanly speaking. Many people feel like that now when confronted with some of the world’s problems.

Man’s Inhumanity to Man

Another “fearful sight” shown on the television news in the late 1990s was the ethnic strife in Kosovo that involved Albanians and Serbs, caused by Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic’s policy of “ethnic cleansing”. He was aiming to create a Greater Serbia, a political strategy that was firmly condemned by the UN Assembly. In Kosovo and Bosnia where mass graves were discovered, particularly in Srebrenica, the discovery sent shock waves around the world and calls from member states in the UN Assembly to bring Milosevic to justice for what was described as his war crimes.

Media coverage showed the heart-rending sight of elderly people being carried on the backs of others as Albanian refugees struggled over the snow-covered hills on their way to Macedonia five miles away. Some were so exhausted that they sat down in the snow with looks of utter despair on their faces. They had been expelled from Kosovo with only the possessions that they were able to carry, after having lived there for generations.

Milosevic’s plan in Bosnia was to divide the land between Serbs and Croats and to “cleanse” the country of its Muslim inhabitants. Independent observers who visited Kosovo and Bosnia were appalled almost beyond belief at the mass graves they were shown.

Natural Disasters

Yet another ‘fearful sight’ that engaged the attention of Christian believers as a sign of the last days was the ‘Tsunami’ (tidal wave) that devastated many coastal regions without warning, particularly Aceh in Indonesia, Malasia, Thailand, the Indian sub-continent, Sri Lanka, the Andaman islands, and the Nicobar islands. It was also felt in Borneo and Cambodia, and even as far south as Perth in Australia.

The loss of life and widespread destruction of property and infrastructures was enormous. People on beaches saw the huge wave rolling on the beach and watched it continue inland on its path of destruction. How tragic it must have been that families suddenly separated from each other were, in many cases, never re-united.

What to Do?

All such calamities should make us aware of the brevity of life and should persuade us to concern ourselves with the real meaning and purpose of life. We are here on earth so that we can try to do what is pleasing in the sight of God and give serious consideration to His merciful plan of salvation, centred in His glorious Son, Jesus Christ. That is a plan that promises everlasting life in the Kingdom of God which is to be established on earth, when Jesus Christ the King rules over all nations in righteousness, justice and peace from Jerusalem, the capital of the world. It is because of what is destined to happen at that time that Jerusalem is rightly called ‘the city of the great King’ (Psalm 48:2).

In what is known as the Lord’s Prayer, the followers of Jesus are encouraged to pray, ‘Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it

is in heaven' (Matthew 6:10). This is a prayer that most readers will have uttered at some time in their lives, for it is regularly recited during Armistice Day, at times of remembrance, at funerals, in schools and colleges, and also in times of disaster, and in parliaments of the Western world. When this prayer is recited we are, in reality, praying for the return of Christ and the establishment of the Kingdom of God upon the earth, a time that will bring real lasting peace and righteousness to our greatly troubled world.



That will indeed be a great time, as described by the prophet Isaiah who said this about the rulership of King Jesus from Jerusalem:

Many people shall come and say, "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; he will teach us his ways, and we shall walk in his paths. For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and rebuke many people; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore" (Isaiah 2:3–4).

True Christianity

The true Christian view is that whatever overtakes us in this present life we know from the Bible that God's plan of salvation promises that those who humbly accept what He has offered by faithful obedience to His laws, will rise in the Resurrection at the return of

Christ and live for ever in God's Kingdom upon the earth. The Bible assures us that this will be the reward of the righteous ones because it says this:

For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at his coming (1 Corinthians 15:22–23).

Just as good things happen in the lives of people there are also times of adversity, as mentioned in another article in this issue. Adversity has its part to play in helping us to realise how much we need the return of Jesus to put everything right.

There may still be 'fearful sights' to come in the future, but true Christian believers must bear in mind that the Bible message is not one of gloom and doom, but one of hope, with the ultimate joy of living for ever in the Kingdom of God upon the earth at the return of Jesus Christ. When it happens it will happen fast, for this is what the apostle Paul said about the consequence of the Second Coming of Jesus:

... 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 (1 Corinthians 15:52).

Dennis Elliott

Regular readers will be sad to hear that since writing this article the author has fallen asleep in Jesus and now awaits the very resurrection he had been writing about, which will happen at the coming of the Lord.

Part One

A Matter of Christian Conscience

To start with, we shall have to spend a little time on the nature of conscience.

The Bible says that man is made in the image of God and when we are explaining what that means we stress that man like God is a moral being. He is able to reason, assess and respond at a moral level. He has a conscience which enables him to distinguish between right and wrong: to know the difference between good and bad.

No other created thing has this capacity and therefore it places man at the summit of God's creation. It is this that makes man akin to God as no other creature is akin to Him. It is often said that a dog is man's best friend. Personally I would want to challenge that, but accepting for the moment this idea, the very best dog has no conscience and quite definitely the very worst man has.

Mankind and Animals

That is one of the essential differences between mankind and the animals – the fact of conscience. Man is a moral creature, and is therefore responsible for his actions. Man is a spiritual creature, able to worship and respond to the love of God. Part of that process is the operation of conscience.

Conscience was placed in man when God said to

the angels:

Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth (Genesis 1:26).

Man was given control over the animals because man had a conscience. Conscience is a capacity of the human spirit which reveals good as goodness and bad as badness.

God-given Mechanism

Conscience is the capacity to recognise the rightness and the wrongness of something. It is a God-given mechanism implanted in us which gives a warning against the bad and an urging toward the good. It does not itself determine what is good and bad, but it always prompts a person toward what is conceived as good and warns against what is conceived as bad.

It may well happen that what a person conceives as right may in fact not be right, but the conscience will urge him to obey that conception, because he thinks it is right. A good example of what I mean is the case of the apostle Paul when he was Saul the Pharisee. At that time he persecuted the church and the disciples of Christ. His conscience told him that it was right to do



that and therefore he did it with zeal. Much later he said of himself:

I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief (1 Timothy 1:13).

When his mind was changed and he understood the real position, his conscience told him to stop the persecution and help the very people he had harmed. Another example is the case of those people in New Testament times who would not eat meat offered to idols, because their conscience told them that to do so was wrong. Paul said that really it was a mistaken view, but because it was a view that was conscientiously held it must be respected. He insisted that it was wrong to make people do something that violated their conscience even though it was mistaken.

Final Arbiter

That does show what an important force conscience is. In the end it has to be the final court of appeal. It is the final arbiter upon our actions and our life. If for some reason we do things that oppose our conscience then there is no peace of mind possible. That is why Paul would not compel the vegetarians to eat meat offered to idols and why he would not interfere with those who wanted to observe certain days as holy.

One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind (Romans 14:5).

Suppose somebody really believes it is wrong – a sin – to take alcohol in any form, then you must never try to make them do it against their conscience. You may discuss with them the issue and seek to change their mind if you

like. But whilst their view remains you must not ask them to violate it. Conscience is sacred. Conscience is sacrosanct.

Conscience: Weak or Strong?

Writing about the problem of meat that had been offered to idols – something that was a common practice in New Testament times in certain countries – the apostle Paul describes some consciences as ‘weak’:

Therefore concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one. For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live. However, there is not in everyone that knowledge; for some, with consciousness of the idol, until now eat it as a thing offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. But food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse (1 Corinthians 8:4–8).

Actually those people who are so described have a conscience which is strong and active, but it was weak insofar as it was badly informed – it did not have the right knowledge. It was that absence of understanding which made it weak. Paul so respected the ‘weak’ conscience of his brothers and sisters that he said he would himself become vegetarian for the rest of his life if necessary.

Absolutely or Relatively?

This both shows how important conscience is and reveals an important principle, namely that there are some things which are absolutely right and other things which are absolutely wrong. And there are some other things which are relatively right and relatively wrong. That is to say that they are right because that is how they appear to you and they are wrong because that is how they appear to you.

Because the conscience is involved this has to be respected. The relative law of conscience in the end will determine what you do. Listen to the apostle Paul again:

Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another. Do not destroy the work of God for the

sake of food. All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for the man who eats with offense. It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak. Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin (Romans 14:19–23).

That is a description of the operation of conscience. Remember conscience does not of itself tell us what is right and what is wrong. Conscience is not a revelation: it is a moral measurement based upon the revelation already received and believed.

Dennis Gillett

To be continued

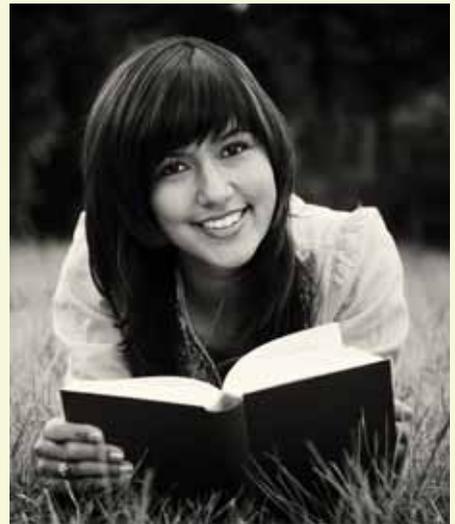
God's Word Purifies

The wise will feed upon God's Word
Which is the only place
Where we can learn to understand
Our God's abundant grace.

Grace is a blessing undeserved,
Yet given to the few
Who seek to know Almighty God
And seek His will to do.

It is God's grace to freely give
Eternal life and love
To those who really understand
Forgiveness from above.

Forgiveness is the blotting out
Of weakness, and of sin:
God's Word can purify the heart
And cleanse the mind within.



Gwen Marley

Growing Strong Together

In the first two articles in this series **Michael Owen** explained that adversity comes to us to make us better people. It is part of the process in which we are being shaped and developed to be the sort of people God wants us to be. It is not something that comes into our life because there are other forces at work – there are no such forces that exist. God is in complete control.

Human Satans

In the Old Testament the word ‘Satan’ is often translated as ‘adversary’ and we saw in the last article that those adversaries can be human ones. We see this well illustrated in the New Testament:

- 1 When Peter stood in the way of God’s will, Jesus called him a ‘Satan’ – an adversary (Mark 8:33);
- 2 Paul describes the problems he was struggling with as ‘a messenger of Satan’ (2 Corinthians 12:7) – it was a form of adversity that added to the other trials he had to endure, and although he prayed for better health he was told that his illness was designed to make him more dependent upon divine help, and therefore a better person:

And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of

Christ may rest upon me (2 Corinthians 12:7–9).

- 3 Paul was banned by the authorities from re-visiting the Greek city of Thessalonica (Acts 17:4-10). When he wrote a letter to the believers and said he was sorry he could not come to see them, he stated, ‘Satan hindered us’ (1 Thessalonians 2:18) – meaning the city authorities who had stopped him from returning.

From these examples we can see that ‘Satan’ has become a word that personified adversity and opposition to God. It became, and has remained, a figure of speech to symbolise anything that gets in the way as an obstacle.

The Words of Jesus

Jesus himself coped with much adversity. He had to deal with much opposition from the religious leaders of his time. He had to struggle with the impulses that came from his nature, for he was ‘born of a woman’ (Galatians 4:4). We are told that he was tempted in every way as we are, although he never allowed himself to sin against God’s laws. Because of this experience, he understands how it is for us (Hebrews 4:14-16).

When explaining that adversity was a necessary part of human development, Jesus once compared our present pain

with a woman in labour:

A woman, when she is in labour, has sorrow because her hour has come; but as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you (John 16:21–22).

In other words, he assures us that we can make sense of present pain when we have a hope for the future. The Bible tells us about that hope.

Facing Hostility

Jesus taught his disciples that they would have to face hostility from people in the world. He never told them that life would be easy. But he said that if they prayed to God for help they would find the strength to get through any situation. After all, Jesus himself had to cope with so much. Even his own family thought he had lost his way when he went about teaching. The authorities wanted to silence him. They tried to catch him in his words, they made insulting comments about his parentage and finally they subjected him to physical and emotional abuse, making him die an agonizing death. But he never lost control of himself; he always allowed the Word of God to guide him and empower him. He never lost his capacity to respond to the needs of those who came to him for help.

So Jesus invites us to be his followers and to draw on the strength of his words and example:



These things I have spoken to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world (John 16:33).

The followers of Jesus certainly did not have an easy time of it after he had gone to heaven. The fact that they became Christians

did not take away the normal struggles of everyday life – ill-health, finding work, family problems, catastrophes of one sort or another. They also had to live with organised opposition from the religious leaders and harassment from many of the authorities in places where they preached their message. People lost their jobs and struggled to support their families. Some were beaten and put in prison.

Faith Works

But they could draw strength from their shared faith. They belonged to a family. God was their Father and Jesus, His Son, was their Lord. They were all brothers and sisters together in him. Regardless of ethnic background, education, gender or social status, all were brought together in a relationship of love and support. The strong learnt to help the weak and vulnerable. In this way, people who were lonely or without family helpers found a family to which they could belong. Through the love of their brothers and sisters in Christ, they experienced the love of God and His Son.

It is the same today. The name Christadelphian means ‘brothers and

sisters in Christ'. Christadelphians try to follow the teaching and practice of Jesus and the early disciples, living with a sense of shared responsibility and care for one another. They try to capture the spirit of these words:

If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honoured, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually (1 Corinthians 12:26–27).

At the heart of this shared life, is the leadership and example of Jesus, who helps us to understand the care of his heavenly Father. The apostle Paul spoke of the many burdens he had to shoulder, of the problems that confronted him, of hardship, imprisonment, shipwreck, beatings and opposition from those he expected to be his friends. But he was sustained by his realization that he was never abandoned by God.

As we have seen, he had a particular problem which dragged on his spirit and he prayed about it. The problem remained, but his spirit was lifted. He realised that God's grace was sufficient for him, that His strength is made perfect in weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9).

God's Grace

God's grace is essentially His saving purpose. It is not a magic potion. It is the knowledge and understanding of His purpose that can help us see meaning in our present lives. If we come to believe in the gospel, we can learn how the trials of the present are

a means of shaping us for the future. We are given hope because the gospel is 'the gospel of the kingdom of God'. It is not only about strength and guidance in our lives now, but about hope for the future.

God has promised that one day, the earth will be a place where people will live in peace, where corruption and violence will find no place. We can always cope better with the struggles of the present if we feel there will be a brighter future. The Bible tells us about



that future. It helps us to see that present adversity can be viewed as though it were the hands of a potter on the clay. The potter squeezes and presses the clay as it turns on the wheel until a beautiful pot takes shape. Then it has to go through the intense heat of the furnace before it is ready for the final glazing.

If we let God work in our lives, then we will learn how all things – including those things that are hard and painful - can work according to His purpose:

Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory (2 Corinthians 4:16–17).

The aim of this magazine is to help you learn more about how a true Bible-based faith can help you to find both strength for today and hope for the future.

Michael Owen

A Catalogue of Problems

*This is a review of world problems with a difference. Every day newspapers and magazines feature these problems and criticise world leaders for their failures or inadequacies. But in the nature of things the writers have no convincing solutions to offer: their aim is to stimulate politicians to ‘do something about it!’ In this series **Andrew White** shows that there is a solution.*

If Only...

The major issues in today’s world, with all their ‘knock on effects’ are problems that man cannot seem to control, despite numerous and vain attempts to intervene in finding some solutions. Some of these are listed below as are the solutions that God offers. Surprising as it may seem to some readers, God has a simple solution to all human dilemmas: He wants men and women to turn to Him when they are in difficulty because He has the answer to all our problems.

↘ Weak Governments

Politicians all over the world promise change but rarely deliver. Instead they often make matters considerably worse. Consider the bizarre rulings brought in through the European Parliament that seeks to control all governments within its confederacy, independent governments with politicians that cannot agree with each other.

God knows that such weak and often corrupt governments will never be the answer. It is God himself who puts them in place in order to encourage men and women to turn to Him and to trust in His solutions, by faith. Long ago a world ruler was given this insight:



‘This decision is by the decree of the watchers, and the sentence by the word of the holy ones, in order that the living may know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, gives it to whomever he will, and sets over it the lowest of men’ (Daniel 4:17).

‘They shall drive you from men, your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and they shall make you eat grass like oxen. They shall wet you with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over you, till you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever he chooses’ (Daniel 4:25).

Then he was driven from the sons of men, his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild donkeys. They fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till he knew that the Most High God rules in the kingdom of men, and appoints over it whomever he chooses (Daniel 5:21).

Despite being an autocratic monarch – a world dictator – it is much to Nebuchadnezzar’s credit that he came to understand that principle and to acknowledge the sov-

ereignty of Almighty God.

➤ **Bankrupt Economies**

In part the present financial problems facing world economies have come about by the malpractice and greed of bankers and their willingness to bet huge sums of money on speculative outcomes.

This has all but destroyed the economies of some countries where successive governments have been living well beyond their means and therefore have enormous borrowing commitments that will take years to reduce. Even paying the interest on the borrowed capital can lead to financial difficulty and some governments might have had to declare themselves bankrupt had it not been for massive rescue packages. Global debt now runs into trillions of dollars and in order to survive, governments have to borrow more!

The Bible has sound advice on this aspect too, something we do well to heed in our own financial management. It tells us that the road to financial ruin is to love money and to desire it above all else.

Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows (1 Timothy 6:6–10).



The Bible message is so true. Money earned by honest work for our employer is good for the necessities in life but when the greed element kicks in it destroys us and when that happens on a grand scale it destroys the whole of society. The signs are clearly there that the rich and powerful empires that ruled the world in

times past were eventually brought to their knees.

The interest alone on the United Kingdom's debt is in excess of £70 Billion and her overall indebtedness exceeds £770 Billion! The USA and other countries have a similar problem. So we see how the mighty western powers are weakened and forced into borrowing from Russia, China and the oil rich Arab States.

This is a dangerous situation, for the Bible predicts that the time is coming when the nations of the world will gather together against Jerusalem (see Ezekiel chapter 38 and Zechariah chapter 14). Countries that are hugely in debt will be in no position to challenge the actions of others who have loaned them large amounts of money.

➤ **Global Warming**

The pace of industrial growth is being blamed for the pollution of the atmosphere that has now taken place with damage to the ozone layer that protects us from the damaging ultra violet rays emitted from the sun. The appropriate level of care was not shown in the past because building a wealthy industrial empire was more important at the time and insufficient thought was given to possible environmental effects which cannot now be stopped.

Indeed even now nations cannot agree on mechanisms that might slow down the damage in case it makes them less competitive than other countries and thus gives them an economic disadvantage.

In April 2010 climatologists estimated that hurricanes for this year's hurricane season are set to escalate to 14 due to the warmer sea temperatures off the USA eastern seaboard. The sea temperature causes humid air currents to rise and they set in motion the cyclonic forces that devastate and destroy whatever is in their path. This year hurricanes and tornados are predicted to be greater than the destructive forces unleashed in the 2005/6 season which included Hurricane Katrina.

Whilst the weather is undoubtedly changing with warmer temperatures and unseasonal weather patterns, some doubt exists about the accuracy of the data put forward as evidence for global warming. Accusations have been made that the factual data for the meltdown of polar ice caps has been doctored. Some people say that what we are now experiencing is just another example of temperature change and that we often have severe winters and excessively hot summers. Others, including some governments, take the view that there is a crisis facing the earth and are spending billions to try to reduce the nation's carbon footprint.

The indicators are not good. Coral reefs are bleaching and destroying the plankton that is the basic element in the food chain. Malaria is spreading,



seasons are shifting and forests are disappearing so increasing the rise in carbon dioxide. Famine predictions are also increasing and water shortages are causing major concerns. It's no wonder that many people fear for the future of the earth. Yet we need not fear if we put our trust and confidence in God and believe His promises. Long ago God promised a

continuance of the pattern of seasons, and he has a long term plan whereby the world will become a better and safer place:

While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, winter and summer, and day and night shall not cease (Genesis 8:22);

Truly, as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord (Numbers 14:21);

For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert. The parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water; in the habitation of jackals, where each lay, there shall be grass with reeds and rushes (Isaiah 35:6-7).

God means to make the earth a beautiful place again when Jesus reigns as King. There are problems to be overcome, but God has an answer to all of them which will be realised in His good time. Meanwhile we need to learn about His plan for us and His gracious offer of salvation from sin and death.

Andrew White

Paul's Defence before Felix

*Paul had been accused by his Jewish opponents of being a trouble-maker, a ringleader of an insurrection and someone who had desecrated the temple at Jerusalem. Brought to Caesarea under armed guard, he was now being tried before the Roman governor Felix and the case for the prosecution had been made by an orator named Tertullus. **John Hellawell** now explains how Paul countered those accusations.*

Point-by-Point

The Governor signalled for Paul to speak. Paul was not going to use flattery as Tertullus did. Rather, he simply states the facts saying, in effect:

- ☞ 'You have had responsibility for ruling this area for a number of years' (about 5, possibly 8 or 9)
- ☞ 'You know full well what the people are like – so I am happy to make my defence'.

No doubt Paul's legal training would be invaluable in presenting his case to a Roman governor. He indicated to Felix that he could easily establish a number of facts which cast strong doubts on the Jews' accusations.

- He had arrived in Jerusalem to worship, no more than twelve days previously and had, of course, been in custody for at least eight of these (Acts 21:33; 22:30; 23:12; 23:31-32; 24:1) This hardly gave him time to plan and instigate an insurrection!
- His accusers did not find him arguing with anybody in the Temple, stirring up a crowd in the synagogues, or stirring up trouble anywhere else in the city.
- Finally, they were unable to prove the charges which they had made.



It is significant that no witnesses of the alleged crimes were put forward. This would be unwise, given the confusion indicated in Acts 21:30,33,34. Felix had read the letter from Claudius Lysias which indicated that he had established that:

- there was no charge against him that deserved death or imprisonment;
- the issue was concerning religious matters only.

It would be evident to the Governor that the charges made by Tertullus (detailed in Acts 24:5 & 6) had been thought up later in order to make the case seem more serious and an

infringement of Roman law.

Paul's Witness

Having denied their charges, Paul was now ready to make a statement regarding his faith. In fact, he seized the opportunity to declare his beliefs and preach to the Governor, and the rest of the court! He stated that he was:

- A worshipper of the God of their fathers (ie. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob);
- A member of the Way which the Jews regarded as a sect;
- He believed everything which agreed with the Law and the Prophets (a hint that he differed from the Sadducees who were largely responsible for bringing the case);
- He had the same hope in God which they had, that there was to be a resurrection of the righteous and the wicked (again a view not shared by the Sadducees); and that
- He endeavoured to live so as to have a clear conscience before God and towards his fellow men.

Explanation

Paul then explained his purpose in visiting Jerusalem.

- He had brought gifts (alms) for the poor (more precisely for the poor Christians) and
- He was making offerings (that is, on behalf of believing Jews who were under a vow).

He then emphasised once more that:

- He was ceremonially clean (and not desecrating the Temple, as they had claimed);
- He was alone and had not gathered a crowd (so he was not a ring-leader of a sect, as alleged); and
- He was not causing any disturbance (so the charge of being a rabble-raising trouble-maker was false).
- Paul was, therefore, not guilty of the three charges made by Tertullus.

Refutation

Paul now turned to the cause of his arrest: the accusations of some Jews from the province of Asia (modern Turkey). These men should have been in court to give evidence and lay the original accusation, not the Sanhedrin and their spokesman Tertullus.

This was a serious point of Roman legal procedure. It was also a fundamental principle of Jewish courts. So far, Paul argued, all that had been said by Paul's accusers was hearsay evidence. Paul now piled on the pressure. The Sanhedrin representatives present in court ought to explain the outcome of the trial, or hearing, which they held in Jerusalem.

Of course that had ended in total confusion! The only crime of which he could possibly be guilty during that trial was to affirm his belief in the resurrection of the dead. The issue was a theological one and Felix would be aware that the Pharisees held the same belief in resurrection, while the Sadducees, who had conducted the case that day, did not. There really was, he argued, no case for him to answer!

Interim Decision

It may be that Felix had come to the same conclusion. Luke tells us that Felix was well acquainted with “the Way”, presumably from his third wife, Drusilla, the daughter of Herod Agrippa I. Instead of dismissing the case Felix adjourned the proceedings. ‘When Lysias comes – I will decide your case’ he explained. This raises two questions.



complicity if the assassins had succeeded. Lysias had, in effect, arranged protective custody for Paul. The explanation given by Felix for deferring the case was really a circular argument! The actual reason was, no doubt, political and personal.

Felix did not want to upset the Jewish hierarchy unnecessarily. If he released Paul he was in danger of doing this and Paul’s life was in danger. Yet, as a Roman he

had rights. The compromise was confinement within the Praetorium and free association with his friends.

There was an ecclesia in Caesarea (see 21:8-14). Philip the evangelist lived there with his four prophetess daughters and, of course, it was where Cornelius lived. This would mean that Paul would have the benefits and fellowship of a substantial number of converts (see Acts 21:16 and 23:33-35). And he would just have to await the eventual decision of the Court.

John Hellowell

Lasting Values

**How foolish are the musings of the world;
What’s deemed important is of little worth
A seeking after vanity and wind
For transient aspirations, hollow mirth.**

**This present world’s akin to shifting sand.
As winds of change move on with lightning speed,
But Godly love and Wisdom grow yet strong
And bring great solace where there is great need.**

Colleen Simons

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