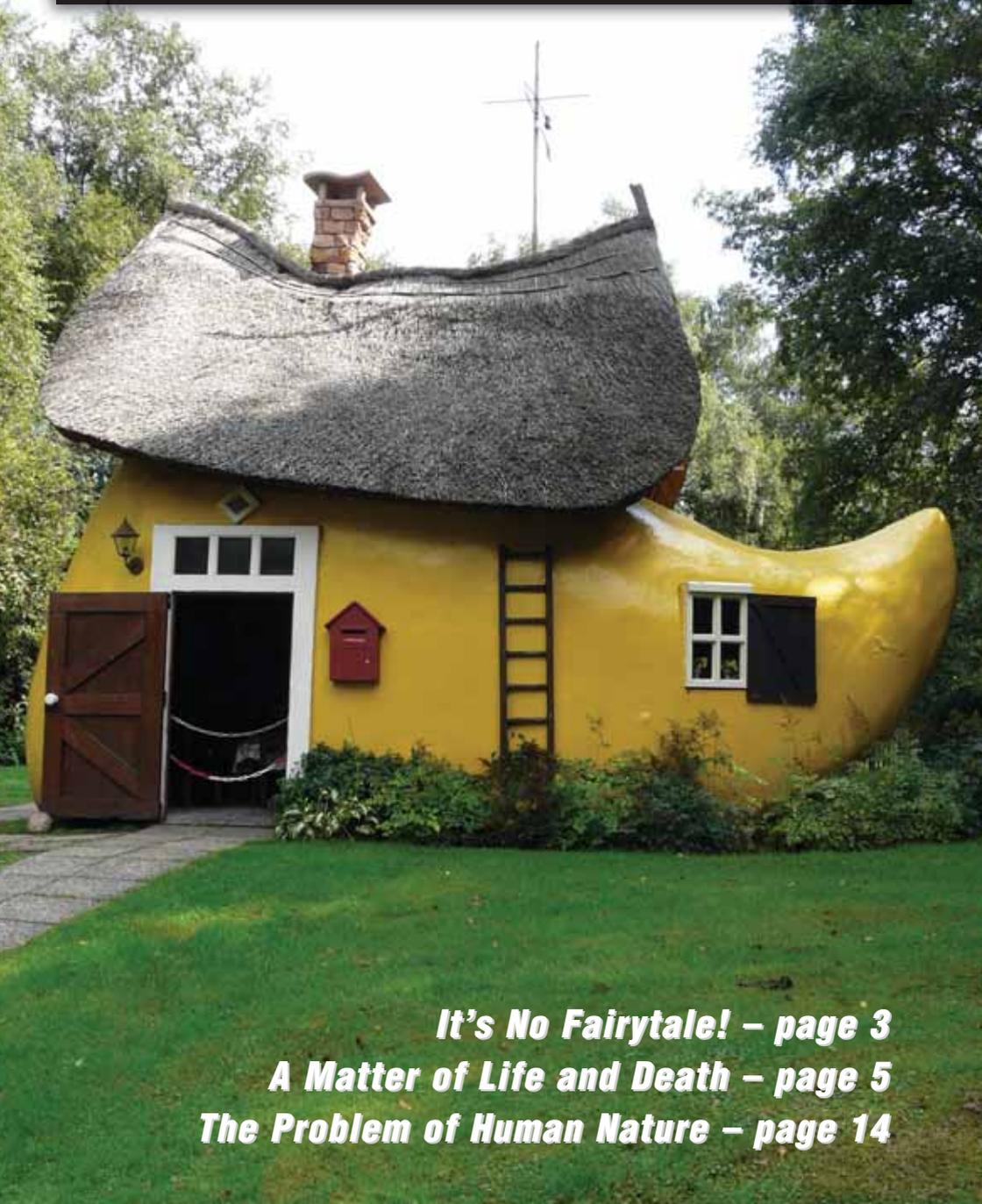


Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1555



It's No Fairytale! – page 3
A Matter of Life and Death – page 5
The Problem of Human Nature – page 14

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

129th Year

M13

1555



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 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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Contents

It's No Fairytale!.....	3
A Matter of Life and Death	5
Putting the Gospels Together	8
Bible Reading Tables	10,11
Have You been Adopted?.....	12
The Problem of Human Nature.....	14
Paul before Felix, Festus and Agrippa.....	16
The Reasonableness of Christianity	18
They were Speaking of Me	19

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Bible Versions

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It's No Fairytale!

Some of the first things we learn are nursery rhymes or fairy tales – stories that make no sense at all, but which are catchy rhymes and tales that people have taught their children over the centuries. In Britain we have stories about

- ❖ Little Miss Muffet who was frightened by a spider;
- ❖ Incy Wincy – a spider that climbed up a drainpipe;
- ❖ Little Bo Peep who lost her sheep, and
- ❖ The Old Woman who lived in a shoe, presumably something like the one on this month's front cover.

They're nonsense poems and stories of course, but good fun for all that.

Funny Stories

Children love stories about witches and wizards and all sorts of improbable things – like a house made out of gingerbread and a wolf that talked to Red Riding Hood. But, as they grow up, children begin to realise that there's a big difference between the world of make-believe and the real world in which we live.

Things that seem too good to be true are usually untrue and finding that out is part of life's experience. Adults have to explain some uncomfortable truths, like: "You have to work hard to get on in life"; "There's no such thing as a free lunch" and "You only get out of life what you put into it".

Learning about Life

These are important lessons to learn because plenty of people will try and

trick you if they can. They might offer you an investment deal where they promise a huge return on your money; but you may never see your money again, because they will just spend it. There are people who will offer to sell you something, but when you send your money you hear no more from them. And there are others who will try to persuade you that their beliefs are the right beliefs about something, when they are in fact quite wrong! But how do you know who to believe and how to choose the best course to follow?

It is especially important to know what to believe about matters which have to do with your eternal destiny. Someone will tell you that you have an immortal soul, so you are bound to live forever, either in pleasant surroundings and happy circumstances or in eternal misery. Someone else will say that there's no prospect of life after death for when you die you cease to exist. Another person will say that you might live forever if you do the right things and make your peace with God. Yet another, that you are destined to return after death in some other form of life, like a butterfly or a frog. How can you know what is right and what is wrong?

God's Message

Regular readers of *Glad Tidings* will know that Christadelphians believe that God has a plan with the earth and mankind which He has revealed in the Bible. We believe that Jesus Christ – the Son of God – was born to save men and women from sin and death, and that he died and rose again to

make that possible. Now in heaven, Jesus is to return to earth as God's appointed king, ruling over a worldwide kingdom centred in Jerusalem and that then the world will become a wonderful place, just as God always intended. At his return, Jesus will raise from the dead those who are now in the unconscious and dreamless state of death, and those who are accounted worthy will work with the Lord Jesus to beautify the world and to work alongside those who survive his Coming and get to live in the new world. All of this is something that God offers quite freely, an offer summed up by one Bible writer like this:

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:23).

Too Good?

How do we know if that's too good to be true? The first reason is because it's in the Bible and the Bible has been shown to be true many times over. Of course there are people who say that the Bible is like a fairytale – something that sounds good when you're young and foolish but which is not believable for thinking adults. Many people who say that haven't even read it and know nothing about:

- ❖ the remarkable way the original text has been preserved,
- ❖ how it has been shown to be historically reliable,
- ❖ the remarkable witness of fulfilled Bible prophecy,
- ❖ the logical case for the bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus from the dead, and suchlike.

We feature items like that in *Glad Tidings* from time to time. But there is



one absolutely convincing way in which you can satisfy yourself about the truth and teaching of the Bible and that is something that Christadelphians have been doing daily for many years.

Read it for yourself

The best way to discover what the Bible is like and what it teaches is to read it, a little at a time until you have read it all. That is why this issue contains a set of Bible Reading Tables (on pages 10 and 11) that suggest a few chapters every day from different parts of the Bible. Resolve to do those readings and during the course of a year you will read the Old Testament once and the New Testament twice. That will give you two huge benefits.

- ❶ You can see for yourself how consistent and accurate the Bible is, without relying upon what others tell you.
- ❷ You can find out just what it is the Bible teaches. There is no better way to listen to what God has to say to you. It can change your life!

Editor

A Matter of Life and Death

When the Lord Jesus returns to set up God's Kingdom there is another event which is certain to take place; that is the resurrection and the judgement. All those who have been responsible to God down through the ages will be raised and, together with the responsible living, will appear before the judgement seat of Christ.

The Dead Raised

References to the resurrection of the dead are quite numerous in Scripture. Here are a few examples:

For since by man came death, by man also came the resurrection of the dead. 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 15:21–23).

Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation (John 5:28–29).

For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, Some to shame and everlasting contempt (Daniel 12:2).

Not All Raised

It is clear from Scripture that not all who have ever lived will be raised (e.g. Isaiah 26:13,14), only those who know the will of God, whether they do it or not. Those who are not resurrected will remain dead in the grave. The resurrection is something which is certain to happen. And so is the judgement. Those raised, and the responsible living, will appear before the judgement seat of Christ, as the Bible explains:

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad (2 Corinthians 5:10).

I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom (2 Timothy 4:1).

Time for Reflection

This is something we need to reflect on. How are our lives in the sight of God? Do we seek to please him in the way we live, or don't we care? We are always living in the shadow of the judgement, knowing that the time is coming when we will have to give account. Those who believe God's Word, truly love Him and seek to do His will, however, do not need to fear the judgement for, as Jesus encouraged his disciples:

Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom (Luke 12:32).

God wants men and women to be saved. After all, He gave His Son so that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. Where do our priorities lie – in this world, or in God's coming Kingdom? It is things such as this that will determine our judgement.

The Lord Jesus, in his teaching, encourages us to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33) and to lay up treasure with God for where our treasure is, that's where our heart will also be (Matthew 6:19-21). If we do this, then in the grace and mercy of Almighty God, we shall also be able to say as the Apostle Paul could at the end of his life:

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved his appearing (2 Timothy 4:7-8).



Life and Death

Throughout this series, we have been considering events which are sure to happen in the future of this world. We have seen that God will send His Son back to this earth to judge the world in righteousness and to set up the Kingdom of God. This will be a physical Kingdom which will eventually replace all the kingdoms of this world. Man's rule will be a thing of the past, and men and women will be instructed in the laws of God and seek to serve Him. Eventually death itself will be destroyed and the earth will be filled with the glory of the Lord.

But all this is still future. Whether or not we share in the blessings of the age to come depends on what we do now. For us, our destiny is really in our own hands.

This is what the Apostle Peter asks us to consider:

The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to

be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless (2 Peter 3:9–14).

New World Coming

The world, as we know it, will be no more. All the things which mankind trusts in will be of no avail in the day when the Lord comes. In that day, silver and gold will be of no value for it cannot save one's life. Prestige and standing will be of no importance. Even if we die before the Lord comes, what value is there in the material things of this life, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out (1 Timothy 6:7).



What is important is our standing in the sight of God. It is no good just living a good life. We need to have our sins forgiven and become part of His family, in order to have hope. Faith and truth and righteousness are the things of real value.

In order to have hope in the age to come, we have to be associated with the Lord Jesus. This is what he instructed his disciples to do when he was about to leave them:

Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned (Mark 16:15–16).

It is essential that we believe the gospel as preached by Jesus and his apostles, in order to have hope. We also need to repent of our sins and be baptised. This is what the Apostle Peter said to the Jews on the day of Pentecost, when they asked him what they should do:

Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call (Acts 2:38–39).

By baptism into Christ we become part of God's family and heirs to the great promises that God made to faithful Abraham so long ago, for the true Christian hope is an Israelitish hope.

For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise (Galatians 3:26–29).

At that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ (Ephesians 2:12–13).

It really is a matter of life and death. The choice is ours – to serve God or to serve self; to live forever or to die eternally.

John Shepley

Putting the Gospels Together

What happens when we try to put the four gospels side by side? Well, there are special books that do just that, called 'gospel parallels'. One of the best is *A Synopsis of the Gospels*, by H.F.D. Sparks. This puts on the same line of the page the exact wording of each of the four gospels as they describe that event in the life of Jesus. It is fascinating to discover how one writer supplies a phrase or idea that the others did not mention, and so we get the full story.

For example, in the Parable of the Sower, only Luke identifies the scattered seed as the 'the word of God'. But when he gives Jesus' interpretation of the good soil, he simply says it represents those who hear the word and keep it. Mark adds that they first accept the word, while Matthew includes the fact that they have to understand it as well.

The Journeys of Jesus

Another absorbing exercise is to piece together on the map the footsteps of Jesus during the three and a half years of his ministry. Again, there are books on this subject – one of the best is *An Atlas of the Life of Christ* by John Stirling, which draws a line on the map to represent Jesus' movements during each season of the year, with scriptural references. The main markers for the passage of the months are the official feasts, especially the Passover in March/April, which every male Jew had to attend in Jerusalem.

This study reveals that most of the

first year of Jesus' ministry was spent in the south, in the area known as Judea, where he was baptising his own disciples in the Jordan. The second year passed in Galilee, his home territory, where huge crowds followed him as he travelled from village to village. At the climax he fed 5000 men plus women and children with bread in the wilderness.

Difficult Times

At the beginning of the third year the tide began to turn. People became disillusioned when he took no active part in politics, and refused to be made a king. Many turned away, and the hatred of his enemies the Scribes and Pharisees grew more virulent. In that summer Jesus led his disciples out of the country altogether, into Tyre and Sidon (present day Lebanon). Jesus needed to escape from the pressures that were building up.

On his return, he avoided Galilee and came down the east side of the Jordan valley to a region inhabited by Gentiles, where he fed the four thousand. From here Jesus crossed the Sea of Galilee back to the western side, but meeting the hostile Pharisees on the beach, got straight back into the boat, and sailed away north east to the top end of the Sea of Galilee, where he commenced a long trek up into the mountains. His disciples must have been puzzled and scared by his behaviour at this point. He seemed to be running away. His Father decided to intervene. On the Mount of Transfiguration Jesus was

joined briefly by Moses and Elijah, brought back to life for a few hours to talk him through the dark days that lay ahead, and to strengthen his resolve.

Through the last autumn Jesus revisited the east of Jordan, travelling slowly south, and spending his last months in hiding, for there was now a price on his head. Finally, the last Passover loomed, and he came up to Jerusalem through Jericho, speaking in parables to avoid any statement that might be used against him. The last days passed in the Temple courts, where he openly condemned the hypocrisy of his enemies. Judas, one of the 12 Disciples, agreed to betray him.

Jesus saved the last night to talk to his Disciples, preparing them for his imminent death. From now on, they would be on their own, and must support each other and learn from the Holy Spirit, the heavenly power he would send to teach them the will of God. Then he went out into the dark night, to face his persecutors, a mockery of a trial, and the agony and shame of a public crucifixion. But as all four writers concur, on the third day the astonished disciples found his tomb empty. Their Lord was alive from the dead!

David M Pearce

Help with your Daily Bible Reading

Use The World Wide Web to help you to do your daily Bible readings (using the reading tables on pages 10 & 11). This is the fourteenth year in which this Christadelphian web site has been available to help people understand the Bible message.

There are over 26,000 comments, charts and tables from more than 50 Christadelphians.

- * View the different thoughts on the day's readings online.
- * Have each day's thoughts e-mailed to you daily – over 1,000 use this facility.
- * Read each reading online in any of 5 different versions
- * Correspond by e-mail with any of the contributors who have written thoughts.
- * Search for comments on specific chapters – a real aid to Bible Study.

The object of the site is to encourage personal Bible reading.

The site can be viewed at <http://www.dailyreadings.org.uk/>

For further information either visit the site and click on CONTACT US or e-mail bible_truth@thebiblesite.co.uk or peterf@thebiblesite.co.uk

Bible Reading

JANUARY

1	Gen. 1, 2	Psa. 1, 2	Matt. 1, 2
2	... 3, 4	... 3, 5	... 3, 4
3	... 5, 6	... 6, 8	... 5
4	... 7, 8	... 9, 10	... 6
5	... 9, 10	... 11, 13	... 7
6	... 11, 12	... 14, 16	... 8
7	... 13, 14	... 17	... 9
8	... 15, 16	... 18	... 10
9	... 17, 18	... 19, 21	... 11
10	... 19	... 22	... 12
11	... 20, 21	... 23, 25	... 13
12	... 22, 23	... 26, 28	... 14
13	... 24	... 29, 30	... 15
14	... 25, 26	... 31	... 16
15	... 27	... 32	... 17
16	... 28, 29	... 33	... 18
17	... 30	... 34	... 19
18	... 31	... 35	... 20
19	... 32, 33	... 36	... 21
20	... 34, 35	... 37	... 22
21	... 36	... 38	... 23
22	... 37	... 39, 40	... 24
23	... 38	... 41, 43	... 25
24	... 39, 40	... 44	... 26
25	... 41	... 45	... 27
26	... 42, 43	... 46, 48	... 28
27	... 44, 45	... 49	... 29
28	... 46, 47	... 50	... 30
29	... 48, 50	... 51, 52	... 31
30	Exod. 1, 2	... 53, 55	... 7, 8
31	... 3, 4	... 56, 57	... 9

FEBRUARY

1	Exod. 5, 6	Psa. 58, 59	Rom. 10, 11
2	... 7, 8	... 60, 61	... 12
3	... 9	... 62, 63	... 13, 14
4	... 10	... 64, 65	... 15, 16
5	... 11, 12	... 66, 67	Mark 1
6	... 13, 14	... 68	... 2
7	... 15	... 69	... 3
8	... 16	... 70, 71	... 4
9	... 17, 18	... 72	... 5
10	... 19, 20	... 73	... 6
11	... 21	... 74	... 7
12	... 22	... 75, 76	... 8
13	... 23	... 77	... 9
14	... 24, 25	... 78	... 10
15	... 26	... 79, 80	... 11
16	... 27	... 81, 82	... 12
17	... 28	... 83, 84	... 13
18	... 29	... 85, 86	... 14
19	... 30	... 87, 88	... 15, 16
20	... 31, 32	... 89	I Cor. 1, 2
21	... 33, 34	... 90, 91	... 3
22	... 35	... 92, 93	... 4, 5
23	... 36	... 94, 95	... 6
24	... 37	... 96, 99	... 7
25	... 38	100, 101	... 8, 9
26	... 39, 40	... 102	... 10
27	Lev. 1, 2	... 103	... 11
28	... 3, 4	... 104	... 12, 13

MARCH

1	Lev. 5, 6	Psa. 105	I Cor. 14
2	... 7	... 106	... 15
3	... 8	... 107	... 16
4	... 9, 10	108, 109	2 Cor. 1, 2
5	... 11	110, 112	... 3, 4
6	... 12, 13	113, 114	... 5, 6, 7
7	... 14	115, 116	... 8, 9
8	... 15	117, 118	... 10, 11
9	... 16	119, v. 40	... 12, 13
10	... 17, 18	v. 41-80	Luke 1
11	... 19	v. 81-128	... 2
12	... 20	v. 129-176	... 3
13	... 21	120, 124	... 4
14	... 22	125, 127	... 5
15	... 23	128, 130	... 6
16	... 24	131, 134	... 7
17	... 25	135, 136	... 8
18	... 26	137, 139	... 9
19	... 27	140, 142	... 10
20	Num. 1	143, 144	... 11
21	... 2	145, 147	... 12
22	... 3	148, 150	... 13, 14
23	... 4	Prov. 1	... 15
24	... 5	... 2	... 16
25	... 6	... 3	... 17
26	... 7	... 4	... 18
27	8, 9	... 5	... 19
28	... 10	... 6	... 20
29	... 11	... 7	... 21
30	... 12, 13	... 8, 9	... 22
31	... 14	... 10	... 23

JULY

1	I Sam. 13	Ira. 56, 57	Rev. 21, 22
2	... 14	... 58	Matt. 1, 2
3	... 15	... 59	... 3, 4
4	... 16	... 60	... 5
5	... 17	... 61	... 6
6	... 18	... 62	... 7
7	... 19	... 63	... 8
8	... 20	... 64	... 9
9	... 21, 22	... 65	... 10
10	... 23	... 66	... 11
11	... 24	Jer. 1	... 12
12	... 25	... 2	... 13
13	... 26, 27	... 3	... 14
14	... 28	... 4	... 15
15	... 29, 30	... 5	... 16
16	... 31	... 6	... 17
17	2 Sam. 1	... 7	... 18
18	... 2	... 8	... 19
19	... 3	... 9	... 20
20	... 4, 5	... 10	... 21
21	... 6	... 11	... 22
22	... 7	... 12	... 23
23	... 8, 9	... 13	... 24
24	... 10	... 14	... 25
25	... 11	... 15	... 26
26	... 12	... 16	... 27
27	... 13	... 17	... 28
28	... 14	... 18	Rom. 1, 2
29	... 15	... 19	... 3, 4
30	... 16	... 20	... 5, 6
31	... 17	... 21	... 7, 8

AUGUST

1	2 Sam. 18	Jer. 22	Rom. 9
2	... 19	... 23	... 10, 11
3	... 20, 21	... 24	... 12
4	... 22	... 25	... 13, 14
5	... 23	... 26	... 15, 16
6	... 24	... 27	Mark 1
7	I Kings 1	... 28	... 2
8	... 2	... 29	... 3
9	... 3	... 30	... 4
10	... 4, 5	... 31	... 5
11	... 6	... 32	... 6
12	... 7	... 33	... 7
13	... 8	... 34	... 8
14	... 9	... 35	... 9
15	... 10	... 36	... 10
16	... 11	... 37	... 11
17	... 12	... 38	... 12
18	... 13	... 39	... 13
19	... 14	... 40	... 14
20	... 15	... 41	... 15
21	... 16	... 42	... 16
22	... 17	... 43	I Cor. 1, 2
23	... 18	... 44	... 3
24	... 19	... 45, 46	... 4, 5
25	... 20	... 47	... 6
26	... 21	... 48	... 7
27	... 22	... 49	... 8, 9
28	2 Kings 1, 2	... 50	... 10
29	... 3	... 51	... 11
30	... 4	... 52	... 12, 13
31	... 5	Lam. 1	... 14

SEPTEMBER

1	2 Kings 6	Lam. 2	I Cor. 15
2	... 7	... 3	... 16
3	... 8	... 4	2 Cor. 1, 2
4	... 9	... 5	... 3, 4, 7
5	... 10	Ezek. 1	... 5, 7
6	... 11, 12	... 2	... 8, 9
7	... 13	... 3	... 10, 11
8	... 14	... 4	... 12, 13
9	... 15	... 5	Luke 1
10	... 16	... 6	... 2
11	... 17	... 7	... 3
12	... 18	... 8	... 4
13	... 19	... 9	... 5
14	... 20	... 10	... 6
15	... 21	... 11	... 7
16	... 22, 23	... 12	... 8
17	... 24, 25	... 13	... 9
18	I Chron. 1	... 14	... 10
19	... 2	... 15	... 11
20	... 3	... 16	... 12
21	... 4	... 17	... 13, 14
22	... 5	... 18	... 15
23	... 6	... 19	... 16
24	... 7	... 20	... 17
25	... 8	... 21	... 18
26	... 9	... 22	... 19
27	... 10	... 23	... 20
28	... 11	... 24	... 21
29	... 12	... 25	... 22
30	... 13, 14	... 26	... 23

ing Tables



APRIL

1	Num.	15	Prov.	11	Luke	24
2	...	16	...	12	Gal.	1, 2
3	...	17, 18	...	13	...	3, 4
4	...	19	...	14	...	5, 6
5	...	20, 21	...	15	Eph.	1, 2
6	...	22, 23	...	16	...	3, 4
7	...	24, 25	...	17	...	5, 6
8	...	26	...	18	Phil.	1, 2
9	...	27	...	19	...	3, 4
10	...	28	...	20	John	1
11	...	29, 30	...	21	...	2, 3
12	...	31	...	22	...	4
13	...	32	...	23	...	5
14	...	33	...	24	...	6
15	...	34	...	25	...	7
16	...	35	...	26	...	8
17	...	36	...	27	...	9, 10
18	Deut.	28	...	11
19	...	2	...	29	...	12
20	...	3	...	30	...	13, 14
21	...	4	...	31	...	15, 16
22	...	5	Eccl.	1	...	17, 18
23	...	6, 7	...	2	...	19
24	...	8, 9	...	3	...	20, 21
25	...	10	...	4	Acts	1
26	...	11	...	5	...	2
27	...	12, 14	...	6	...	3, 4
28	...	15	...	7	...	5, 6
29	...	16	...	8	...	7
30	...	17	...	9	...	8

MAY

1	Deut.	18	Eccl.	10	Acts	9
2	...	19	...	11	...	10
3	...	20	...	12	...	11, 12
4	...	21	Song	1	...	13
5	...	22	...	2	...	14, 15
6	...	23	...	3	...	16, 17
7	...	24	...	4	...	18, 19
8	...	25	...	5	...	20
9	...	26	...	6	...	21, 22
10	...	27	...	7	...	23, 24
11	...	28	...	8	...	25, 26
12	...	29	Isaiah	1	...	27
13	...	30	...	2	...	28
14	...	31	...	3, 4	Col.	1
15	...	32	...	5	...	2
16	...	33, 34	...	6	...	3, 4
17	Joshua	1	...	7	1 Thes.	1, 2
18	...	2	...	8	...	3, 4
19	...	3, 4	...	9	...	5
20	...	5, 6	...	10	2 Thes.	1, 2
21	...	7	...	11	...	3
22	...	8	...	12	1 Tim.	1, 2, 3
23	...	9	...	13	...	4, 5
24	...	10	...	14	...	6
25	...	11	...	15	2 Tim.	1
26	...	12	...	16	...	2
27	...	13	...	17, 18	...	3, 4
28	...	14	...	19	Titus	1, 2, 3
29	...	15	...	20, 21	Philemon	...
30	...	16	...	22	Heb.	1, 2
31	...	17	...	23	...	3, 4, 5

JUNE

1	Joshua	18	Isaiah	24	Heb.	6, 7
2	...	19	...	25	...	8, 9
3	...	20, 21	...	26, 27	...	10
4	...	22	...	28	...	11
5	...	23, 24	...	29	...	12
6	Judges	1	...	30	...	13
7	...	2, 3	...	31	James	1
8	...	4, 5	...	32	...	2
9	...	6	...	33	...	3, 4
10	...	7, 8	...	34	...	5
11	...	9	...	35	1 Peter	1
12	...	10, 11	...	36	...	2
13	...	12, 13	...	37	...	3, 4, 5
14	...	14, 15	...	38	2 Pet.	1, 2
15	...	16	...	39	...	3
16	...	17, 18	...	40	1 John	1, 2
17	...	19	...	41	...	3, 4
18	...	20	...	42	...	5
19	...	21	...	43	2 & 3 John	...
20	Ruth	1, 2	...	44	Jude	...
21	...	3, 4	...	45	Rev.	1, 2
22	1 Sam.	1	...	46, 47	...	3, 4
23	...	2	...	48	...	5, 6
24	...	3	...	49	...	7, 8, 9
25	...	4	...	50	...	10, 11
26	...	5, 6	...	51	...	12, 13
27	...	7, 8	...	52	...	14
28	...	9	...	53	...	15, 16
29	...	10	...	54	...	17, 18
30	...	11, 12	...	55	...	19, 20

OCTOBER

1	1 Chron.	15	Ezek.	27	Luke	24
2	...	16	...	28	Gal.	1, 2
3	...	17	...	29	...	3, 4
4	...	18, 19	...	30	...	5, 6
5	...	20, 21	...	31	Eph.	1, 2
6	...	22	...	32	...	3, 4
7	...	23	...	33	...	5, 6
8	...	24, 25	...	34	Phil.	1, 2
9	...	26	...	35	...	3, 4
10	...	27	...	36	John	1
11	...	28	...	37	...	2, 3
12	...	29	...	38	...	4
13	2 Chron.	1, 2	...	39	...	5
14	...	3, 4	...	40	...	6
15	...	5, 6	...	41	...	7
16	...	7	...	42	...	8
17	...	8	...	43	...	9, 10
18	...	9	...	44	...	11
19	...	10, 11	...	45	...	12
20	...	12, 13	...	46	...	13, 14
21	...	14, 15	...	47	...	15, 16
22	...	16, 17	...	48	...	17, 18
23	...	18, 19	Daniel	1	...	19
24	...	20	...	2	...	20, 21
25	...	21, 22	...	3	Acts	1
26	...	23	...	4	...	2
27	...	24	...	5	...	3, 4
28	...	25	...	6	...	5
29	...	26, 27	...	7	...	7
30	...	28	...	8	...	8
31	...	29	...	9	...	9

NOVEMBER

1	2 Chron.	30	Dan.	10	Acts	10
2	...	31	...	11	...	11, 12
3	...	32	...	12	...	13
4	...	33	Hosea	1	...	14, 15
5	...	34	...	2	...	16, 17
6	...	35	...	3	...	18, 19
7	...	36	...	4	...	20
8	...	37	...	5	...	21, 22
9	...	38	...	6	...	23, 24
10	...	39	...	7	...	25, 26
11	...	40	...	8	...	27
12	...	41	...	9	...	28
13	...	42	...	10	Colos.	1
14	...	43	...	11	...	2
15	...	44	...	12	...	3, 4
16	...	45	...	13	1 Thes.	1, 2
17	...	46	...	14	...	3, 4
18	...	47	...	15	...	5
19	...	48	...	16	2 Thes.	1, 2
20	...	49	...	17	...	3
21	...	50	...	18	1 Tim.	1, 2, 3
22	...	51	...	19	...	4, 5
23	...	52	...	20	...	6
24	...	53	...	21	2 Tim.	1
25	...	54	...	22	...	2
26	...	55	...	23	...	3, 4
27	...	56	...	24	...	5
28	...	57	...	25	...	6
29	...	58	...	26	...	7
30	...	59	...	27	...	8
31	...	60	...	28	...	9

DECEMBER

1	Esth.	9, 10	Janah	1	Heb.	6, 7
2	...	11	...	2, 3	...	8, 9
3	...	12	...	3	...	10
4	...	13	...	4	...	11
5	...	14	...	5	...	12
6	...	15	...	6	...	13
7	...	16	...	7	...	14
8	...	17	...	8	...	15
9	...	18	...	9	...	16
10	...	19	...	10	...	17
11	...	20	...	11	...	18
12	...	21	...	12	...	19
13	...	22	...	13	...	20
14	...	23	...	14	...	21
15	...	24	...	15	...	22
16	...	25	...	16	...	23
17	...	26	...	17	...	24
18	...	27	...	18	...	25
19	...	28	...	19	...	26
20	...	29	...	20	...	27
21	...	30	...	21	...	28
22	...	31	...	22	...	29
23	...	1	...	23	...	30
24	...	2	...	24	...	31
25	...	3	...	25	...	1
26	...	4	...	26	...	2
27	...	5	...	27	...	3
28	...	6	...	28	...	4
29	...	7	...	29	...	5
30	...	8	...	30	...	6
31	...	9	...	31	...	7

By courtesy of The Christadelphian

Have You been Adopted?

Sarah looked wistfully at her grandson, Stephen. He was a healthy, lively boy with a good appetite and full of energy. His father loved him dearly. Sarah remembered how Stephen had been when she had first met him – so different from now. Her son had adopted him when Stephen was a young boy. Stephen's biological father had been addicted to drugs, not expected to live long, and certainly unable to care for his son.

Then Stephen had been quiet, frightened, dirty, under-nourished and with little happiness or hope in his life. He could barely talk, never smiled, and even seemed unable to cry. His only emotion seemed to be fear. He had been virtually alone in the world and presented a very sad picture. Had he been left where he was he too would have died before long.

Now Stephen had a comfortable home, healthy diet, and his adoptive father's continued love, care and protection. Sarah was thrilled to see the transformation in the child. However, she sometimes wondered whether, when he grew up, he would choose to stay in this family or would revert to the tragic circumstances of his early childhood.

Our Natural Family

Being without a father is a sad state. In Bible times it was very serious as the father was usually the one who provided for his family. In the Law of Moses – the code of law given to Israel by God – the fatherless had to be treated with compassion and special provision was made for them:



When you reap your harvest in your field, and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow (Deuteronomy 24:19).

When the Jews were in captivity in Babylon their plight was so severe that they compared themselves to orphans.

"We have become orphans and waifs..." (Lamentations 5:3).

Having a supportive family is very important for children. By nature, we belong to the family of Adam. Adam disobeyed God and thereby brought a death sentence on himself and on all of us. We sin, and so we die. As the apostle Paul explains:

Just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned (Romans 5:12);

For as in Adam all die... (1 Corinthians 15:22);

For the wages of sin is death... (Romans 6:23).

In fact we are naturally addicted to sin – it is our natural way of thought and life, and is highly displeasing to God. As Paul explains again:

The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God (Romans 8:7–8).

If you live according to the flesh you will die (Romans 8:13).

In this way we too are born into a situation which is just as serious as Stephen's was, in his natural family. Without God we have no hope and it is just a matter of time before the effects of our way of life destroy us.

God as our Father

There is an alternative. We have the opportunity to escape and to be adopted: God offers to be our Father. The apostle Paul writes to Christian believers at Ephesus like this:

He chose us ... that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will (Ephesians 1:4–5).

Similarly, he writes to the Galatian believers:

But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons (Galatians 4:4–5).

The contrast could not be greater, as Paul describes it to the believers at Ephesus:

...At that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ (Ephesians 2:12),



Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God (Ephesians 2:19).

Our Choice

In the family of Adam we are hopeless and helpless, and have plenty to fear. If we accept God's offer of salvation we have everything to hope for, everything to live for, and God then promises to take care of us.

We can then address God as our Father (as in the Lord's Prayer). But God will not force us. It is up to us. Just as Stephen could turn his back on the security and love of his stepfather, we can reject the offer to be the children of Almighty God. He asks us to respond – to believe and to be baptized. As Jesus said:

He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned (Mark 16:16).

Anna Hart

The Problem of Human Nature

The first five studies in this series were bright and encouraging ones. They were about God Himself and the wonderful plans that He has for the earth.

But then we had to face the fact that we humans have not cooperated willingly with our Creator. Most of the time we have disobeyed Him in major and tragic ways and even people with good intentions fail sometimes.

The Bible calls this disobedience 'Sin', and we have seen how sin has resulted in death. However, one man succeeded where all the rest of us failed. That man was Jesus, and in the next few articles we hope to see that through him God offers to save all who really want to be part of that plan of salvation which will fill this earth with His glory.

Unpleasant Facts

First we have to face the facts about this human nature of ours. We have seen how the first human pair were tempted and chose to please themselves rather than God (Genesis 3). Then their oldest son Cain killed his brother Abel (Genesis 4) and within a few more generations human behaviour had become so bad that almost everyone then living was destroyed by a flood. Only one family – Noah's – had the faith to be saved (Genesis 6).

The urge to please SELF had become so strong that it was the ruling principle in human life. It is true that in order to survive, men and women need courage and determination, and these qualities are gifts from God. But when



people oppose the laws of God that leads to sin, which is defined as “lawlessness” (1 John 3:4). That is the situation that we find ourselves in now – we all have this resistance to the laws of God deep inside ourselves: we want to live our lives our own way.

Human Waywardness

In the New Testament the Apostle Paul tells us how much he wanted to please God, but he described his experience this way –

I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells ... But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! (Romans 7:18,23-25).

In a later study, God Willing, we shall learn more about the way that God has opened through Jesus, which enables us to escape from ‘this body of death’,

as the apostle termed it. But for now, let us be very clear in our minds about this human resistance of ours to the will of God, and how strong it is.

Jeremiah's Experience

The prophet Jeremiah said this about human nature:

O Lord, I know the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps (Jeremiah 10:23).

In other words, we might think we know what to believe and how to live, but unless we go about it in God's way we shall go astray. Later in his book, Jeremiah gives us the reason for this –

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it? (Jeremiah 17:9).

Jeremiah knew this better than most people. He had to force himself to be a prophet of God when he didn't want to be (Jeremiah 1:4-10). He tried to give up because he was so badly treated (Jeremiah 20:9-10), but he had to continue. And although he spoke God's messages and warnings to his own people in Jerusalem for over 40 years, they refused to listen. At last, because of their unbelief, they were taken captive to Babylon, as Jeremiah sadly recorded in his chapter 52.

Not the Answer

Jeremiah's fellow-citizens loved to think that they could please God and have their sins forgiven by performing rituals and ceremonies despite their bad behaviour. That was a big mistake, even when those ceremonies were part of the Law of God. People still make that mistake today.

This was also the case when Jesus

was here. The religious leaders at that time had made hundreds of rules that covered every detail of life. Some rules for instance concerned how people should wash before eating. People were taught that if they failed to keep these rules they were 'defiled' (meaning they were 'not acceptable to God').

The Heart

It is a matter of getting the heart right with God. Jesus said that what 'defiles' us is not what goes into our mouths but what comes out of them! (Matthew 15:17-20). Then he went on to say this:

For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man (Matthew 15:19–20).

So human nature is a big problem; but we can look forward to discovering the solution! Never forget that we are the problem and that will help us to understand what the Bible writers mean when they use the words 'the devil', and 'satan'.

We shall see that the Bible itself explains the terms that it uses, and that we can only learn what its meaning is by starting at the beginning and allowing the Bible to teach us. If we have ignored the Old Testament we are sure to misunderstand what we read in the New Testament.

Understanding that we have a problem – or that we are the problem – is the first stage towards doing something about it. As Jesus once said, you don't go to the doctor to get treated unless you first recognise that you are sick!

John Woodall

Paul before Felix, Festus and Agrippa

The apostle Paul was arrested in Jerusalem because it was thought that he had introduced a Gentile into the Temple. He had needed to defend himself on the steps of the barracks from the Roman soldiers and in front of a Jewish mob.

He made an impassioned speech explaining that whilst he fully respected the Jewish customs, he was now a follower of the Lord Jesus. Later on there had been a plot to kill Paul, which had been discovered by his nephew, so that Paul had been removed to Caesarea during the night for his own safety.

In Caesarea, Paul had to defend himself to the Roman governor, Felix, in front of his Jewish accusers. Felix found the charges made by the Jews difficult to follow but, to appease the Jews, he decided not to release Paul, so that he was still in custody when Felix was replaced as governor by Festus.

Two Appearances

Not long after he had assumed the role of governor, Festus listened to Paul's defence, again with the Jewish accusers present. Festus found the accusations difficult to follow, but when he offered Paul the opportunity to go to Jerusalem to defend himself, Paul appealed to Caesar, which was his right as a

Roman citizen. Festus was expecting visitors, King Agrippa II and Bernice, actually his sister although they were having an incestuous relationship. Agrippa was the great grandson of Herod the Great, the very Herod who had all the Jewish boys under two murdered at the time of Jesus' birth. Agrippa had an intimate knowledge of Jewish matters, as Paul acknowledged when he began his speech:

I think myself happy, King Agrippa, because today I shall answer for myself before you concerning all the things of which I am accused by the Jews, especially because you are expert in all customs and questions which have to do with the Jews. Therefore I beg you to hear me patiently (Acts 26:2-3).

Paul went on to explain that his life in Jerusalem had been well known to all the Jews. He had been a Pharisee, and lived carefully within the rules of

that sect. Now he said that he was on trial for exactly what the Jews believed, or should believe:

I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers (Acts 26:6).

He also posed a question about why it should be thought strange that God



should raise the dead. Perhaps more striking is Paul's account of his own opposition to the teachings of the Lord Jesus. Paul was very honest in admitting all that he did when he had persecuted and imprisoned those who followed the Lord Jesus. Then he acted as an enemy of the young church.

Next came an account of his conversion. It was whilst he was on his way to persecute Christians in Damascus that he was stopped by the Lord Jesus.

At midday, O king, along the road I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who journeyed with me. And when we all had fallen to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me and saying in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads' (Acts 26:13–14).

Commissioned

The voice came from the Lord Jesus, who saw Paul's actions as not just against the members of the church, but also directly against him. The bright light which arrested Paul then was also the signal for him: a commission to begin a new life serving the Lord Jesus Christ, preaching to the Gentiles. Paul was told what he now had to do:

To open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in me (Acts 26:18).

This is a concise statement of what the gospel is all about. In words which seem to be a magnificent understatement, Paul says quite simply: "I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision" (Acts 26:19). Beginning in Damascus,

he moved on to Jerusalem before beginning his wider work in the area to the north of the Mediterranean Sea. Throughout his preaching work, disaffected Jews sought to oppose all that Paul said and did, even though he claimed that he was only continuing the message of Moses and the prophets.

Therefore, having obtained help from God, to this day I stand, witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come—that the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles (Acts 26:22–23).

Was Paul Crazy?

Festus, the Roman governor could not follow all this, but thought Paul was mad. Paul however knew that Agrippa had followed his argument carefully, and was on the point of accepting all that Paul had said. According to one translation, "Agrippa said to Paul, A little more and you will be making me a Christian" (ESV).

Sadly it was not to be. Agrippa declared to Festus that if Paul had not appealed to Caesar he could have been set free, but the Lord God had told Paul that he was to witness to his faith in Rome (Acts 23:11), so he was destined to travel there.

This was the last of the great speeches recorded in Acts, a little sad because on this occasion there was no great flood of converts, but there was work for the Apostle Paul in Rome, and beyond, and that he gladly embarked upon.

Mark Sheppard

The Reasonableness of Christianity

Recently I came across an article about the 17th century philosopher John Locke who wrote a book called *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, and the title caught my eye. Locke lived at a time of intolerance when the differing ideas on religion, science and politics aroused much bitterness. I have to say that not too much has changed in 400 years!

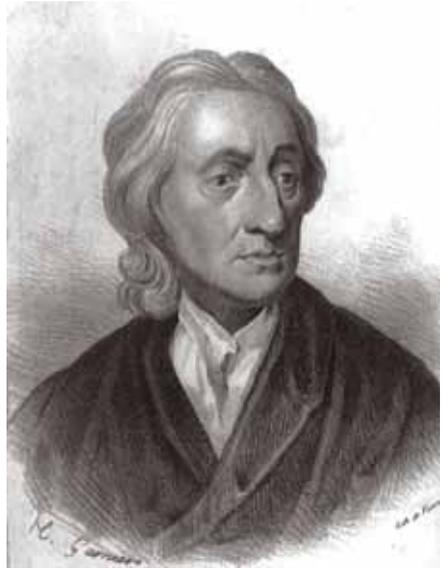
Philosopher and Thinker

Locke was a contemporary and friend of Isaac Newton and was acknowledged to be “one of the most conspicuous figures in the intellectual history of modern Europe”, but there was more to him than intellectual debating.

He was distressed by the acrimony between the Churches and the disputes that sprang from an illogical way of thinking. In 1693 he published *The Reasonableness of Christianity* basing his arguments on scriptural grounds. In his preface Locke said that he had found little satisfaction and consistency in most of the systems of religion he had met with, and this had made him read the Bible only for the understanding of the Christian religion.

Bible Reading

As Christadelphians this is what we have been doing for over 150 years! Locke discovered that “*by reason of Adam’s transgression, all men are mortal and come to die*”. And by ‘death’ he could understand nothing but a ceasing to be, the losing of all actions of life and sense’. He next dis-



covered by reading the Bible that from the state of death there was no restoration except by resurrection, and this could come about solely by the intervention of Jesus Christ.

Conditional Salvation

Salvation, he found, was conditional and could not be purchased (unlike the practice of ecclesiastical fees for the passage of the imaginary departed immortal soul through purgatory into heaven, as taught in his day). Men and women became righteous, he concluded, by a belief in God and by faith in the promises which He had made to mankind.

These promises told that God would send a deliverer, a Messiah. The New Testament showed that resurrection and salvation were offered to all those who acknowledged Jesus as the

Messiah and who, after signifying by baptism their acceptance of his kingship, lived as became subjects obedient to the laws of the Kingdom of God.

Locke understood that Christianity in its simplicity could be understood by all and especially by the common people, who Jesus also knew would respond to his teaching. They could understand that this wonderful man, Jesus, died and came alive again; and they could also believe that he would return to the earth, as he promised.

Striking Conclusion

Locke concluded his book with the following words:

“If the poor had the Gospel preached to them, it was, without doubt, such a

gospel as the poor could understand, plain and intelligible; and so it was in the preaching of Jesus Christ and his apostles.”

How refreshing to read Locke’s words – which are still true today. This man was trained in human philosophy and human reasoning but was able to see that God’s Word – the Bible – held the simple truth about life, death, the hope of the resurrection and the offer to live in God’s kingdom at the return of Jesus to the earth.

May we all read the Bible for ourselves and see the reasonableness of Christianity – understand the need to be baptised into the saving name of Jesus and begin a new life of hope.

Wendy Sykes

They were speaking of Me

I opened my Bible and started to read
How Man, at his best, is of nothing but dust,
To which he returns, in the blink of an eye –
Despite all his knowledge, he cannot tell why;
And I knew they were speaking of me, Lord,
I knew they were speaking of me.



I worked through the Scriptures and painfully saw
That few have raised up their poor selves from that dust,
But greedily pandered to Self from the start,
With all the desires of their devious heart,
And I knew they were speaking of me, Lord,
I knew they were speaking of me.

But as I read on in God’s wonderful Word,
A message of hope came to light from the page:
There will be a Kingdom of saints in the earth,
Those who through repentance have come to new birth
And I knew they were speaking of me, Lord,
I knew they were speaking of me.

Liz Robinson

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