

Glad Tidings

of the Kingdom of God

1569



All Things New – page 3
A Book of Many Colours – page 5
Why I Know God Exists – page 10

Glad Tidings

of the Kingdom of God

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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.

Glad Tidings Distributors

for orders and payments

United Kingdom – Cilla Palmer, "Highlands",
78 Mildenhall Road, Fordham, Ely, Cambs,
England CB7 5NR

Tel: (01638) 723959 (24 hrs & Fax)

cilla@gladtidings.fsnet.co.uk

Australia – Jon Fry, 19 Macey Street, Croydon South,
Victoria, Australia 3136

gladtidingsaustralia@gmail.com

Canada – Vivian Thorp, 5377 Birdcage Walk,
Burlington, Ontario, Canada L7L 3K5

vivianthorp@bell.net

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

South Africa – A. J. Oosthuizen, P.O.Box 50357,
Musgrave Road, Durban 4062, South Africa

antoost@mweb.co.za

U.S.A. – Pat Hemingray, 3079 Kilburn West,
Rochester Hills, USA MI 48306

Other Countries – Andrew Johnson, 22 Hazel Drive,
Hollywood, Birmingham, England B47 5RJ

andrew@gladtidings.me.uk

Editor: Owen Tecwyn Morgan, 26 The Crescent,
Hampton-in-Arden, Solihull, England B92 0BP
glad.tidings@virgin.net

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All Things New

When snowdrops appear during the winter, emerging through the frozen ground and then showing such delicacy and fragility, you know that winter won't last forever. These beautiful little flowers bring a message of hope and happiness. However bad things might be, they are harbingers of something better that is coming, hopefully soon.

Bad Times

Much of the developed world is experiencing hard times at present. It seems that people have become accustomed to a lifestyle that their country's productivity cannot maintain, so for years wages have been at a standstill and public services have been cut back.

Many European nations, including Britain, have been facing an 'austerity budget' in an attempt to limit national borrowing and 'balance the books'. It has not been a popular strategy and the result has been hard for many people, especially those who have lost their jobs and who now struggle to survive. No wonder people ask if there is any end to this process of cutting back and making do. All this is causing political anxiety and further unrest.

Death and Taxes

At the turn of the year, when pundits review the past twelve months and forecast how the coming year might work out, one headline said it all: "*The Only Certainty is Uncertainty*". It was Benjamin Franklin, in a letter to Jean-Baptiste Leroy, in 1789, who made the now-famous statement:

"Our new Constitution is now established, and has an appearance that promises permanency; but in this



world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes".

Uncertainty is something we have to cope with and we are designed accordingly. For only God knows the end from the beginning and His foreknowledge is a divine prerogative. Solomon explains that God has given us a sense of anticipation and apprehension which is quite different from the animal kingdom, but He has concealed just what the future holds for each of us:

He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

To return to Benjamin Franklin's comment for a moment, we know that one day we will die, but we don't know when, and it is as well that we don't know. For if we knew, we would be always living with that deadline looming over us. In Bible times, when God's prophets ministered, there was a king who was told that he would live another fifteen years. King Hezekiah had that life-sentence to serve, which for him and for his nation was much

better than the alternative (see Isaiah chapter 38). On the other hand, Jesus once told a parable about a rich farmer who was so concerned about storing his abundant harvest that he planned larger barns, only to be told:

‘Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?’ (Luke 12:20).

Divine Certainties

In an uncertain world, some things are unshakeably true and are unalterable. The promises God has made cannot fail, for when God says something it has to happen. As one apostle put it: *“Let God be true but every man a liar”* (Romans 3:4). What he meant was that God’s words can never fail, even if everyone else is shown to be liars and utterers of falsehood. This is not just a put-down for mankind, although it is that because none of us ever keep our promises absolutely. It is rather a declaration of divine certainty. God will never fail to fulfil what He has said; His words are rock-solid certainties.

Sometimes God emphasises that by adding an oath for confirmation (Hebrews 6:16-17). On one occasion, He even confirmed His actions by His very existence, and there is nothing more assured than that:

I have pardoned, according to your word; but truly, as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord (Numbers 14:20–21).

God has a purpose with the earth which will include the establishment of His kingdom, or rulership, here once again. Long ago, when there were kings in Israel, God’s kingdom existed on earth and people had the opportunity to witness a better way of life in

action. But that arrangement only lasted some 400 years before collapsing because of human indifference and unbelief. Then Jesus was born and he showed us what mankind is capable of in terms of a living and vibrant relationship with God. Born the Son of God, the Lord Jesus always obeyed and always pleased his heavenly Father. And he willingly gave his life for us, so that we can also share in a loving relationship, through him, with our heavenly Father.

A Living Hope

When Jesus rose from the dead, three days after he was cruelly crucified, his resurrection was a remarkable expression of hope. When the Bible uses the word “hope”, it doesn’t mean something that might happen, as in the expression “Oh! We do hope so”. We use the word loosely because we can never be absolutely sure what will happen. When God’s prophets or apostles talk of the hope of the gospel, or urge us to put our hope in the living God (e.g. Jeremiah 17:7), they are referring to something that is certain, which gives us hope. On trial before his accusers, the apostle Paul could make this assertion:

This I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets. I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust (Acts 24:14–15).

That wonderful hope is available for all who read God’s Word and act upon it, as God requires.

Editor

A Book of Many Colours

The Bible is God's message to the human race, so you'd expect it to be a special book. But did you know that it's also a great read?

It has to be said, it's not always easy: it's an ancient book, and most of us can't read it in its original languages and we have to read it in translation; so its style takes some getting used to. But when you do get used to it, it's a book which is fascinating, colourful and always uplifting.

How to Read It

First, the ground rules. Being God's book, the Bible should be read with reverence. In the words of the prophet Isaiah, *"On this one will I look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word"* (Isaiah 66:2). And it should be read with an open mind, ready to learn: *"For the Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding"* (Proverbs 2:6).

Of course the Bible's not one book but a collection of 66 books, written by many different people in widely differing circumstances over a period spanning thousands of years. Within these books you can find virtually any genre you care to name. The Bible is a book of many colours!

Here are just a few examples:

❖ Adventure

David was a hero in every sense of the word: strong, courageous, charismatic, and also a man of deep faith in God. The account in the books of Samuel of his adventures as he rose from shepherd boy to be King of Israel would not be out of place in a 'Boys' Own' adventure magazine.



For instance, read 1 Samuel chapter 26. David and his band of outlaws are on the run from the insanely jealous King Saul. Saul and his army are closing in on David, but with breathtaking audacity David and a loyal friend sneak into Saul's camp in the middle of the night, and David finds himself with an opportunity to kill his enemy with cold blood. What should he do?

❖ Proverbs

Proverbs are little snatches of wisdom which we can use in our everyday lives. For instance, *"Red sky at night, shepherd's delight; red sky in the morning, shepherd's warning."* The Bible contains an entire book of proverbs. They range from pithy memorable two-liners (for example *"Before destruction the heart of a man is haughty, and before honour is humility"* (Proverbs 18:12) to involved treatises on different moral issues. For example Proverbs 6:6-11 is a poem about what you get from being diligent and the contrasting results of laziness.

❖ Philosophy

Ecclesiastes is a richly poetic book that asks and answers the age-old question: 'What is the meaning of life?' Many sages and thinkers



throughout history have mused on this question, and philosophers are famous for thinking about everything and never coming to conclusions – but the book of Ecclesiastes is different, it approaches the question from God's perspective and it comes to a clear and definite conclusion. You can read it for yourself in Ecclesiastes 12:13-14.

❖ **Drama**

The book of Esther was traditionally read aloud at the Jewish festival of Purim, which can be a boisterous and noisy event. It's a curious fact that there is no direct reference to God in the book of Esther, and one explanation that's been suggested for this is that it's to avoid any danger of accidentally showing disrespect to God during the public readings.

The story is about Esther – the Jewish queen – who saved her people from destruction at the hands of their

implacable enemy Haman. It was a very serious situation, but you can imagine today's Jewish audience laughing and cheering as time and again the dastardly schemes of the wicked Haman are turned on their head. For instance, read Esther chapter 6.

❖ **Romance**

The book of Ruth is the heart-warming story of a destitute Moabite widow and a rich Jewish landowner who are brought together by their mutual devotion to God. Incidentally, they became ancestors of Jesus Christ. Ruth is just four chapters long, so it doesn't take long to read the whole book.

❖ **Songs**

The book of Psalms is the Bible's song book. The Psalms were originally meant to be sung, although we have little idea what the music would have sounded like. But even in our language, you can't fail to appreciate the beauty of the poetry in the Psalms. Musicians over the centuries have been setting the Psalms to music in different styles, from medieval chants to modern devotional ballads.

When words are set to music, they hold the attention and they're memorable. In the 150 Psalms you will find the whole spectrum of emotion – there are Psalms that praise God for His greatness and goodness, Psalms which plead for help in distress or depression, Psalms which plead for forgiveness and Psalms which rejoice in forgiveness, Psalms of thanksgiving and Psalms designed to teach all about God and His ways. One that is well-loved is Psalm 23, in which the Psalmist sees his situation much like that of a sheep in God's flock.

❖ Logical argument

As well as being a devoted and tireless preacher, the apostle Paul was a highly educated academic with a brilliant mind. Probably nowhere do we see the sheer power of his intellect better than in his Letter to the Romans where, with precise, methodical, inexorable reason, he considers the question: How can we be righteous?

Scholars say the language in the Letter to the Romans is of a complexity that you wouldn't normally find outside a university text book, so you should not expect it to be an easy read – but when you make the effort, this wonderful letter yields profound lessons. For instance, read, re-read and ponder chapter 8 verses 1-11.

❖ Biography

The ultimate life story is of course that of Jesus Christ. The four Gospels Matthew, Mark, Luke and John each present an account of his ministry from a slightly different perspective. Together they present a picture of the perfect man – a beautiful character, merciful and forgiving but zealous for truth and right – the man who showed us what God is like. And it's much more than a biography: the story of Jesus' life, death and resurrection is the account of how God offers salvation to the world.

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

Matthew chapter 5 is the beginning of a discourse that's sometimes called the 'sermon on the mount' – it gives a

good flavour of Jesus' teaching, which is as challenging and inspiring today as it was when the sermon was first delivered on that Mediterranean hillside.

❖ Self-help

The world is full of books written by every kind of 'guru' which promise to enable us to achieve, enjoy and fulfil our lives. You can find books to help you do anything, from losing weight to combatting phobias, to getting rich.

As a 'self-help manual' the Bible is in a league of its own. What other book promises to show you the meaning of life, how to get true contentment and fulfilment, how to achieve your maximum potential in life, and how to go on and live for ever?

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16,17).

Chris Parkin

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www.gladtidingsmagazine.org



Paul's Letters to Timothy

These letters are different from all those we have read so far. They are written to individuals, and not to a congregation. They are known as 'pastoral' (shepherd) letters because they were written to guide two young leaders of the flock.

Timothy and Titus were both willing helpers of the Apostle, and we have met them already when we looked at the Acts of the Apostles. Paul had often entrusted them with important assignments, to act in his stead. These epistles are the words of a team leader to his assistants – a great example of how to encourage others.

1 Timothy

The third verse of the first chapter tells us that as Paul writes, he is in Macedonia, and Timothy has been left behind in Ephesus to tidy up unfinished business. This combination does not fit any of the journeys in Acts. It probably belongs to a time after the end of Acts chapter 28, when the apostle was released from prison to resume his travels.

It sounds as though the congregation at Ephesus was being distracted by Jewish Christians who argued endlessly over trivialities. They delved into genealogies (as if it matters who you are descended from!). They set themselves up as interpreters of the details of the Law of Moses, but missed the real point of the Law, which was to produce love in human hearts. So Paul lays down some ground rules for conduct in the church.

He says it is important to pray for those who rule over us, so that we may

continue to worship in peace. He says the brothers should do the praying, while sisters should dress modestly, and not take a teaching role. He writes an imaginary job application list for an elder of the congregation (good teacher; disciplinarian; respected in the community; hospitable; happily married). Then he compiles one for a deacon (this term is obscure – it may refer to a trainee elder). To improve the standards in the congregation, Paul is saying, you need to start at the top. Men teaching celibacy or special diets or fitness courses, or wasting time on myths and tales of demons, were to be shunned.

This responsibility for transforming attitudes was a tall order for Timothy, who was timid by nature, but his mentor encouraged him to teach by example as the best way to convince people he was right.

There had been cases of misapplying church funds at Ephesus that needed correction. We know there was no government social support system in the first century for people who were poor, such as women whose husbands had died young. So it was usual to make welfare payments to widows out of the church collections that were taken on the first day of each week. In chapter five, Paul lays down rules about eligibility. Only if there were no children or grandchildren to support a widow should she receive a payment, and then she must be over 60, and have a good reputation (1 Timothy 5:9,10). These are all practical issues, and it is interesting to see how the same set of challenges exist today.

The last chapter returns to the subject of slaves, who must respect their masters, especially if they were Christians. It also warns of the danger of devoting time to money and possessions, with that immortal phrase:

the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil (1 Timothy 6:10),

– teaching which is particularly appropriate in today's materialistic society. Instead, Paul charges Timothy to guard well the deposit entrusted to him by his absent Lord (shades here of the Parable of the Talents), and encourage people to be rich, not in stocks and shares, but in good works.

2 Timothy

The second letter to Timothy is sad. It is the last letter we have that Paul wrote, just before he was executed. The Emperor had turned against the Christians. Paul had been arrested, and brought to Rome a second time, as a ringleader of the hated community. He was waiting for his court hearing to come up, and he was pretty sure of the outcome. He desperately wanted to see his young friend again before he died, and there was not much time.

The remarkable feature of this letter is the calm confidence of the great apostle in the reward that lay beyond the Roman sword that would end his life. Humanly speaking, his life had been a failure – the proud young lawyer with the world at his feet had been reduced to living in a damp prison cell with no possessions but a few scrolls, and death on the walls. But his faith rises way above his circumstances. His Lord had conquered death.

Our Saviour Jesus Christ ... has abolished death and brought life and

immortality to light through the gospel, to which I was appointed a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles. For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is able to keep what I have committed to him until that Day (2 Timothy 1:10–12).

The aged apostle spends the first two chapters encouraging Timothy to be brave in this time of persecution. He was not to be ashamed of the gospel, but stand up and give his testimony. Nothing is gained without effort, he reminds him.

- ✓ Soldiers on campaign endure discomfort.
- ✓ Athletes train hard to win.
- ✓ Farmers perspire as they prepare the ground for the future crop.

So we must accept suffering sometimes as our duty, and remember that the reward is worth the pain. Sadly many Paul once trusted had disowned him when the persecution began to bite, but he commends Onesiphorus, a brother from Ephesus. This old friend had taken his life in his hands to search out the particular prison in the sprawling metropolis where Paul was being held.

The Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain; but when he arrived in Rome, he sought me out very zealously and found me (2 Timothy 1:16–17).

Then Paul writes about his hopes and expectations for the future, after his death.

David M Pearce

Why I Know God Exists

I like to take walks in the countryside near my home on the outskirts of Birmingham, and I find it a great pleasure to observe the wildlife and the plants on my walks; this often sets me thinking about God the great Creator of all things that live and have their being on our planet. I just cannot miss seeing the evidence of God's existence all around us in the natural world.

Worldly Wisdom

How is it that so many people come to the opposite view that God does not exist and the whole of our world – life on earth and the universe – has all come about by blind chance? It is convenient for exponents of this view to argue that anything could have happened over the millions of years that are deemed to have passed since it all began and yet – as no one was around to observe these events – it is really not possible to say that everything came about by chance, and not by divine design.

Godless evolution is a theory not a fact and there are many instances in science of a theory being disproved when scientists actually get to observe that which they had been theorising about.

If it comes to a choice between believing God's Word, the Bible, or the writings of Charles Darwin or Richard Dawkins, there really isn't much of a choice. The Bible has been proved true over and over again and has a remarkable track record of proving the sceptics wrong. For the Bible reveals God's message to mankind and tells us that He created the heavens and the earth as part of a great purpose



involving mankind. It also explains that it is a revelation which has to be believed if it is to achieve the end that God purposes. As Jesus once said:

At that time Jesus answered and said, "I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes" (Matthew 11:25).

And the apostle Paul expressed the same truth in these words:

Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? ... But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty (1 Corinthians 1:20,27).

A belief in Creation these days is often derided and looked down upon by the evolutionists because it is "unscientific." Those who are clever in the world, having the "wisdom of the world", consider such believers to be 'quaint and old fashioned', but God's Word is the most important yardstick by which to measure everything.

So, people whose eyes have been

opened to the existence of God see the evidence of His existence in the world that He has created. Other people don't see that, even when they are designers and engineers. They too are trying to design and build, but they are blind to the work of the great Designer who made all things.

Life from Life

In the nineteenth century, a French scientist called Louis Pasteur conducted experiments which showed that life can only come from life. This later became known as the law of biogenesis – that living things come only from other living things, by reproduction. Yet many people today believe that life came out of “a primordial soup” of chemicals or from chemicals that were brought to earth by comets and meteorites, hence the interest in finding out about Mars or Comet 67P, upon which Philae recently landed from the Rosetta mission, undertaken by the European Space Agency.

However, it is an established, observed fact – no matter how long you leave a test tube or a bucket full of the chemicals of life – life will never be spontaneously generated. Or put another way, even if you had all the components of a car lying around on your garage floor – going in there and just sitting down would never make you the car! Energy and intelligence is required to put the car together, and similarly God provided the energy and the intelligence to put life on earth in the beginning.

The Simplest Cell

Even the simplest cell such as the amoeba is really hugely complex, as recent discoveries about DNA have shown.

The point about DNA – or deoxyri-

bonucleic acid – is that it controls the construction of all living things upon earth. It is a complex molecule that encodes the genetic instructions used in the development and functioning of all known living organisms. That means that it contains the instructions – or “the code” – required to create and maintain living things, which is why you don't get a giraffe giving birth to a donkey. As the Bible says, it is each “*according to its kind*” (Genesis 1:21, 24).

A computer programmer would appreciate the fact that for something to be coded, it requires intelligence to produce it. Nature cannot of itself produce something as complex as DNA. No wonder it has been called a “clever molecule” for it stores incredible amounts of information within the very small space of a cell and makes copies of itself, to mention just a few of its wonderful features. It's wonderful because the Lord God in heaven is its Designer and Creator. God is the original programmer for He coded DNA.

Sleeping Dolphins

Do dolphins (and whales) ever go to sleep? Yes, they do. ‘How do they do this’, you might ask because dolphins are air-breathing mammals and if they tried to sleep in the normal way, they'd drown! So, how do they sleep in the



water? Apparently, when they go to sleep, one half of their brain shuts down to rest, leaving the other half awake to carry on, looking after the animal's welfare and functions. Then, when the first brain half has finished sleeping, it wakes up and swaps with the half that was awake! Now that's amazing! Was such an arrangement the product of blind chance acting over millions of years? I think not! This, and many other such things, is a process designed and implemented by intelligence – the wisdom of the LORD God Almighty.

Self-Awareness

Humans are the pinnacle of the animal world because that is what God intended when He first created Adam and made him capable of reflecting the divine image (Genesis 1:26).

Things went badly wrong, of course, as the Bible explains and now mankind has an inbuilt tendency toward wickedness and the disobedience of God. But there is also a capacity for redeeming qualities like love, compassion and mercy, which are often found being demonstrated by godly people.

One great fact about the human make-up is that humans are self-aware. That means that they can appreciate creation in a way that no other animal on earth can. Here, for example, are the words of King David as he contemplates the world that God has created:

When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained, what is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him? For You have made him a little lower than the angels, and You have crowned him with glory and honour. You have made him to have dominion



The Crab Nebula: Credits: NASA, ESA and Allison Loll/Jeff Hester (Arizona State University). Acknowledgement: Davide De Martin (ESA/Hubble)

over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet... (Psalm 8:3–6).

Fearfully and Wonderfully Made

There are many more examples in the natural world which can be drawn upon to support the existence of God. I have picked a few of my personal favourites and in making this assessment I am in good company, for King David himself said to God:

I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvellous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well (Psalm 139:14).

This is a sentiment echoed by all who believe in God and recognise Him as the Great Creator. Everything in the natural world has been wonderfully made and it declares to all who “have eyes to see and ears to hear” that here is overwhelming evidence of God's existence”. Open your eyes and see!

Grahame A Cooper

King Ahab

Ahab was a really bad king, ruling over the northern tribes of Israel, as opposed to the southern tribes known as Judah. More than 100 years after his reign the prophet Micah found the nation at fault, on this basis:

All the works of Ahab's house are done; and you walk in their counsels, that I may make you a desolation, and your inhabitants a hissing. Therefore you shall bear the reproach of My people (Micah 6:16).

That says it all about Ahab's reputation as a bad king, yet there is something appealing about his life and his conflicts with the prophet Elijah. It is as though he was like a little boy who refused to grow up.

His Father's Son

Ahab became king on the death of Omri, his father, another really bad king, of whom it was said:

He walked in all the ways of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and in his sin by which he had made Israel sin, provoking the Lord God of Israel to anger with their idols (1 Kings 16:26).

Ahab was little different, indeed even worse, for it was said that: *"Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him"* (1 Kings 16:33). As we look at his life it becomes clear that we are dealing with a very evil man. He reigned over the northern kingdom of Israel for 22 years, from 874 – 853 BC, and so was a contemporary of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah.

The biggest mistake Ahab made was to marry a woman called Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians. The very name Ethbaal suggests his links with the idol Baal, and his daughter seems to have been well taught by her father. Ahab made no attempt to worship the Lord God of Israel. Instead he built an altar to Baal in a temple for Baal which he had built in his capital city of Samaria. He obviously became totally dominated by his wife.

God's Response

The Lord God decided to punish the nation with drought and famine, to bring them to their senses. Perhaps not unnaturally, Ahab laid the blame on God's messenger, the prophet Elijah, rather than on his own behaviour, and the way he had led his people. He sought to kill Elijah, who had to be hidden by God for the 3½ years of the drought. Just before it ended, Elijah challenged the priests of Baal to a contest on Mount Carmel. Each group was to attempt to offer a sacrifice, but no source of fire was allowed. Whichever sacrifice was burned would conclude the argument. Not surprisingly, Baal's prophets failed, but the sacrifice to the Lord God was burnt totally, even though it had been soaked with 12 water pots full of water, probably from the sea.

After his sacrifice had been consumed by fire, Elijah called for all of Baal's prophets to be killed, all 850 of them, which provoked Jezebel to a fury:

“So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time” (1 Kings 19:2).

She had no authority to send such a message to Elijah but, by this time, Ahab was well and truly under her thumb.

Naboth’s Vineyard

A little later Ahab played the spoilt child again. A man called Naboth had a vineyard in Jezreel, near Ahab’s summer palace, about 24 miles away from Samaria. Ahab thought that Naboth’s vineyard would make a good herb or vegetable garden but Naboth knew that Jewish law prevented him from exchanging or selling it (1 Kings 21:3, Leviticus 25:23). This law prevented land being accumulated by the rich and ensured a fairer distribution of wealth. Having received Naboth’s refusal, Ahab went home and sulked but Jezebel took a very different approach:

“You now exercise authority over Israel! Arise, eat food, and let your heart be cheerful; I will give you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite” (1 Kings 21:7).

Ahab ought to have known there would be trouble. Jezebel was without any moral scruples and arranged to have Naboth and his sons arrested on trumped-up charges, and then stoned to death. When Ahab went to claim the land, Elijah was waiting for him. Ahab greeted him thus:

“Have you found me, O my enemy?” And he answered, “I have found you, because you have sold yourself to do evil in the sight of the Lord” (1 Kings 21:20).

Sadly, Ahab did not recognise that his enemy was his own wickedness



and the unscrupulous ways of his wife. Both Ahab and Jezebel were to suffer for their wickedness (see 1 Kings 21:21-24)

Ahab’s reign ended tragically, but the king had to discover that he could not go on ignoring all that the Lord God said. He could have lived like a king, and been blessed by God. Instead he chose a wicked wife and listened to her, allowing her to dominate all that he did. There was one redeeming moment to his reign. When Elijah told him what the Lord God would do, he made at least an outward show of repentance. So God spoke again to Elijah:

“See how Ahab has humbled himself before Me? Because he has humbled himself before Me, I will not bring the calamity in his days. In the days of his son I will bring the calamity on his house” (1 Kings 21:29).

What a pity the King did not humble himself before God earlier in his reign. Had he done so the outcome might have been very different.

Mark Sheppard

What is the Holy Spirit?

Remember that the Bible comprises two Testaments – Old and New – and that the Old is twice the size of the New and records God's purpose over several thousand years, whereas the New is the record of what happened over a time period of less than 100 years.

First Mention

It follows that when we want to know about God, we need to start in the Old Testament and that is where we first hear about God's spirit. In the very first chapter of the Bible we read that when God began the work of making the earth ready for living things: *"the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters"* Then God said, *"Let there be light"; and there was light* (Genesis 1:2,3).

Psalm 33:6 takes us further when it comments that:

By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all the host of them by the breath (or 'spirit' – same word in the original Hebrew) of His mouth" (Psalm 33:6).

This tells us that God's spirit is the power by which He does things. Psalm 104:27-30 describes the way that God provides for all His creatures, and then says:

You open Your hand, they are filled with good. You hide Your face, they are troubled; You take away their breath, they die and return to their dust. You send forth Your Spirit, they are created; and You renew the face of the earth (Psalm 104:28-30).

Breath = Spirit

The word translated 'breath' is the Hebrew word *'ruach'*, which means wind or breath or spirit. The word is used in different ways, but it is never used as a name for God himself. The idea that God is three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit is a mistake: it is an idea that was fabricated by church leaders many years after Jesus ascended to heaven, and long after the New Testament was completed. Indeed, the New Testament proves it to be wrong.

Both Testaments are insistent that there is only one true God – the Father of the Lord Jesus:

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all (Ephesians 4:4-6).

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 (1 Corinthians 8:6).

God's Spirit is His Power

As we have seen, God's spirit is the power by which He creates and maintains all things. The Bible calls God's spirit the 'Holy Spirit' when He is using it in the work of saving people from sin and death. A good way to see this is to look at the only places in the Old Testament where the phrase is used. Here they are, all three of them –

- ❖ *Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me (Psalm 51:11);*
- ❖ *But they rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit; so He turned Himself against them as an enemy, and He fought against them (Isaiah 63:10).*
- ❖ *Then he remembered the days of old, Moses and his people, saying: "Where is He who brought them up out of the sea with the shepherd of His flock? Where is He who put His Holy Spirit within them?" (Isaiah 63:11).*

We should not think of God's spirit as merely energy such as electricity, but as the way in which God Himself is present throughout the Universe, hence the Psalmist's question:

Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? (Psalm 139:7).

Jesus said that *"God is spirit"* (John 4:24), so it is not surprising, and very beautiful, that occasionally God's Spirit is spoken of as 'He'. God the Father is everywhere, by the power of His spirit. He once asked:

"Can anyone hide himself in secret places, so I shall not see him?" says the Lord; "Do I not fill heaven and earth?" (Jeremiah 23:24).

In the New Testament

When we read the New Testament with this understanding, all is plain. Matthew, in chapter 1:18-23 explains that Jesus was conceived by the action of the Holy Spirit. This does not mean that he is the Son of the Holy Spirit, because if you look again at 2 John verse 3 you will see that Jesus is the



son of the Father, not the son of the Holy Spirit. This assures us that the Holy Spirit is God's power, not a person.

Luke tells us the same when describing the conception of Jesus. Mary asked the angel, *"How will this be, since I am a virgin?"* And the angel answered:

The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God (Luke 1:35).

By the Holy Spirit God sent messages to the prophets in Old Testament times – *"For prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit"* (2 Peter 1:21).

Then, when the Holy Spirit caused Jesus to be born, and God granted him Holy Spirit power without measure (John 3:34) when he was about 30 years old, people were able to see a perfect revelation of God's ways in a man like themselves 'yet without sin' (Hebrews 4:15). How right it is therefore that Jesus is called 'The Word of God' (John 1:14; Rev 19:13). For Jesus was the very embodiment of all that God had revealed previously, about His character, His nature and His gracious purpose.

John Woodall

Bible Teaching and Christian Life

Think what this title is suggesting – ponder the ideas which underlie it. It is suggesting that people are regulated by what they believe. It is proposing that:

- ❖ **Behaviour** is conditioned by faith; and that
- ❖ **Character** is not just accidental – it is the outcome of principles learned and doctrines assimilated by the mind.

So the very strong inference is this – that there is a difference between human goodness and Christian behaviour. This principle – that behaviour is regulated by belief – is of course well known and well tried. The Bible proclaims it in this way: “*as he thinks in his heart, so is he*” (Proverbs 23:7).

Observe then the importance of this principle: A great deal is going to depend upon what a person believes. Wrong belief may result ultimately in a false life, judged by the standards of truth and honesty. That is why the Bible puts so much emphasis upon knowing the truth and why the New Testament writers spoke out so strongly against influences which were capable of corrupting the truth.

God’s Revelation

The apostle Paul pronounced a double curse upon those who wilfully contaminated vital truth and corrupted the gospel. From this we draw an important conclusion, namely that in the Bible there is no such thing as abstract truth. If you doubt it, think what the Bible is. It is the revelation of the will

of God, the communication of His purpose to mankind; the documentation of His mind for men and women. This revelation has not been given so that we can speculate, dispute and disagree. It has been given to us for the purpose of making us like God.

The object of the Truth is godliness – god-likeness. It is possible to be very theological, yet utterly irreligious. After all, the Truth is not just a thought and no more. It has been given to mankind so that at last it might pass into action. A man is half false already who speculates about the Truth but never does it, or is never changed by it.

The Truth is only really true when it becomes embodied in a human life. Observe the proof of this in the New Testament. In the Acts of the Apostles there is a record of how one day the apostle Peter stood in the presence of the High Priest of Israel speaking about the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and to the High Priest he said this: “*We are witnesses to these things*” (Acts 5:32).

The apostle did not just mean ‘we saw them happen’, though that was true. He meant – ‘We men, as you see us to be, are the witnesses. We prove the truth of this gospel by the transformation of our lives. We ourselves are the credentials’.

Good-Living People

The truth of the resurrection had become incarnate in the lives of those apostles and this illustrates the difference between human goodness and Christian behaviour. Human goodness

is the outcome of natural graces and natural virtues developing in a humanly natural way. Christian behaviour is different.

It is not the development of natural gifts: it is a way of life arising out of a changed mind and a regenerated heart. Sometimes that runs opposite to natural ways, involving the elimination of those tendencies which have been inherited, demanding the repudiation of those feelings which are humanly natural but spiritually dangerous. I say sometimes this is so but not always. For it is possible for the gospel to take a person's natural gifts and channel them into the way of the Christian life, ennobling them and giving them a lustre which otherwise they would never have.

Conversion

The Apostle Paul is an outstanding example of this principle. As a Jew he was faithful and zealous in his religion; zealous to the point of fanaticism and his zeal led him mistakenly to persecute the Christian faith and to commit to prison and death the disciples of Jesus Christ. One day he was arrested by Christ on the road to Damascus and as a result of the revelation his life was changed. He did not lose his natural zeal, but that zeal was re-directed. The strength he had spent seeking to destroy Christ was now spent seeking to support and proclaim him.

Mark it well. A new capacity for service arose out of a revelation. One was the divinely natural outcome of the other. The case of Paul is a splendid example of the principle we are now examining. What Paul proved to be as a man and as an apostle arose directly out of the revelation he had received from God. In all kinds of ways the Bible insists on this principle. Here

are two examples from the apostle Paul's letter to the believers at Ephesus:

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave himself for her... (Ephesians 5:25).

Behind the husband's love for his wife and the wife for her husband is a doctrine of spiritual love which makes it beautiful and marks its quality.

Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ ... And you, masters, do the same things to them, giving up threatening, knowing that your own Master also is in heaven, and there is no partiality with him (Ephesians 6:5-9).

Here is the workplace and industrial relations governed by a doctrine of the Lordship of Christ in heaven, and operating on earth. How you view the world will regulate how you use the world. A truly worldly person is one who lives wholly on the material plane. A man who never sees through the material to the spiritual, will live only for the things that he can see and hear. Another man may come to understand that there is another dimension to life, and will have his mind focussed upon the things that God has revealed and the great purpose of God that he wants to become part of.

This has been a long introduction to the subject, but that is the principle we have to examine in this short series – that what you believe is the force which determines how you will live and what you are like.

Dennis Gillett

To be continued

The Living God

We understand what life is when we have seen death. A dead animal, bird or, sadly, a loved one shows that there is nothing there anymore. Those vital signs of life and animation are gone; the canvas is blank.

This observation was also true of traditional gods that have been worshipped over the years. Now museum pieces, made of metal, wood or stone – they are as lifeless as they have always been. Even those gods which may be seen in the temples of some eastern religions are inanimate. They are just lifeless objects carved or shaped by a human trying to imitate life.

The Living God

God states that He is full of life; that He always has been and always will be full of life. Jesus said as much when he declared that *“the Father has life in Himself”* (John 5:26). From early in the Bible, God is called *“the living God”* on many occasions. The children of Israel who came out of Egypt were not renowned for their faithfulness, but for their faithlessness. Yet even they could tell that the appearance of God at Mount Sinai was an expression of life-giving power, for they said to Moses:

Who is there of all flesh who has heard the voice of the living God speaking from the midst of the fire, as we have, and lived? (Deuteronomy 5:26).

Even the pagan king Nebuchadnezzar – the great Babylonian Emperor recognized that the true God was a being full of life, when he described Daniel as the *“servant of the living*

God” (Dan 6 :20). And the last book of the Bible depicts an angel coming to mark those who belong to God with a marker which is described as *“the seal of the living God”* (Revelation 7:2).

God Eternal

God has always existed, for He – and He alone – has intrinsic immortality (1 Timothy 6:16). But the wonderful news is that God means to make others immortal. At present our lives are of limited duration because we fail to think and behave as God does. He has a plan to deal with that and Jesus Christ has shown us that we too can share the life of God. When Jesus said that *“the Father has life in himself”*, he added, *“so He has granted the Son to have life in himself”* (John 5:26).

The apostle Paul teaches us that Jesus is only the first man to gain *“life in himself”* and that many others will follow. This can happen if we follow the example of Jesus in our attitude to God and in our behaviour to each other and believe what God has told us about His coming Kingdom on the earth. Then we can look forward to being truly living beings full of life, energy and zest for doing what is right, as Jesus did. Then, and only then, the emptiness of death will be gone forever.

Those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint (Isaiah 40:31).

Cynthia Miles

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cbma.treasurer@gmail.com

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philsnobelen@shaw.ca

India

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tim@galbraithmail.com

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