

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1482



Life's Ups and Downs – page 3

Jezebel: The Infamous Queen – page 5

The Trouble caused by Christianity – page 11

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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 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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Life's Ups and Downs

The financial market has been in turmoil in recent weeks all round the world. Millions of dollars were wiped off shares as fears about unsecured mortgage lending and repayment problems spread from the US to other countries.

Banks and Building Societies were hardest hit as they were forced to tighten-up controls and limit inter-bank lending. It all caused a loss of confidence and there was a run on one of Britain's banks, the first for about 150 years.

Having Confidence

Everything in life has its ups and downs and there are very few things about which we can be entirely confident. We may have good health today; but who knows what tomorrow might bring? Our crops might be growing well; but the weather can easily change: storms, floods or prolonged drought can bring devastation. Our animals might look healthy but, as Britain has recently experienced, they could be affected tomorrow by foot-and-mouth or the blue tongue virus. One accidental leak of a virus strain or a few infected midges from elsewhere is all that it takes. And what can be done then?

Recovering from such a situation takes time and a

great deal of effort. Once confidence is lost, it is hard for people to win it back; as we have probably found ourselves. If someone lets us down, it can take a while before we fully trust them again; and people may feel the same about us. Such experiences can have you wondering if there is anything to really rely upon, anything in which you can place your absolute trust.

Rock Solid

The UK Bank that got into financial trouble was called "*Northern Rock*" and many of its worried customers decided to withdraw all their money. Some queued all day long to make sure, and their panic triggered anxiety elsewhere. At last the Government had to step in and guarantee the deposits, while the US Treasury reduced their lending rates to try to stabilise world markets. People felt that "*Northern Rock*" was not as well-founded as its name implies.

The Lord Jesus once told a parable about two builders who chose quite different locations for their dwellings.

One built on sandy ground: it was an easy option for digging the foundations and clearing the site. No doubt his house was built much quicker and easier than the other. For the second builder chose to build on a rocky site: imagine the work in clearing the rocky outcrop, digging down to



bedrock and getting a level base for the footings and the floors. It must have been tough and he could have wondered whether it was worth it at the time.

Then a savage storm came: *“the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house...”* (Matthew 7:27). The one built on sand fell, *“...and great was its fall”* (7:27). But the one that was built on the rock stood firm. Explaining the parable, Jesus said:

“Whoever hears these sayings of mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock” (7:24,25).

Hearing and Doing

Jesus had just been teaching his disciples about the new way of life he had come to offer, a way of abundant blessing for all those who obey him and keep his commandments. People listened carefully, for Jesus was an outstanding teacher; but they were not always ready to do what he commanded. He had, for example, started his ministry by going to John the Baptist to be baptized, and he had submitted to baptism himself, despite John's protests. Jesus did this to demonstrate that everybody who wants to live like him needs to be baptized, for he said: *“Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness”* (Matthew 3:15). And the same gospel ended with the commission Jesus gave to his disciples:

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and

of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you” (28:19,20).

We can still hear the words of Jesus, for they have been accurately recorded in the New Testament; all we have to do is read them. But then we must act upon them, if we are to build our lives on a rock-solid basis, one which will never disappoint us and never let us down. The promises of God have that quality because they are made by One who is in control of everything and who has a gracious purpose which is bound to be fulfilled.

Certain Promises

God once made great promises to Abraham – father of the Jewish people – and you may notice something very unusual:

“By myself I have sworn, says the LORD ... in blessing I will bless you, and in multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies” (Genesis 22:16,17).

It was a prediction of the coming and rulership of the Lord Jesus Christ, made 2000 years in advance. But notice that God added an oath which he swore by His very existence, There is nothing more certain than the existence of God, whatever atheists and agnostics might say, and for God to affirm something in this way makes it doubly sure.

You can stake your life on that certainty. In all the ups and downs of life, that promised blessing will never fail, and you can become part of it, if that's what you really want.

Editor

Jezebel - The Infamous Queen

There was a time when people challenged the historicity of the Bible and said it was just myth and legend. But as further work has been done, more and more sites and artefacts have shown that the Bible is firmly based in fact and history.

*That is because it is the Word of God and communicates His message and His offer of salvation to mankind. In another of his occasional articles, **David Burges** now shows how a wicked queen came to feature in the Biblical record.*

The name “Jezebel” has become proverbial of a shameless or scheming woman. The original bearer of the name was indeed a notorious Bible character. She was born a princess, the daughter of the Phoenician Ethbaal, king of Sidon. Secular history records that her father gained the throne by assassinating his brother and was high priest of the pagan god Baal, and Jezebel certainly followed in her father’s footsteps!

The Bible records that she became wife of the Israelite King Ahab and persuaded him to introduce the worship of Baal into Israel and to build a temple to Baal in Samaria, the capital city of the northern kingdom (1 Kings 16:30-32). She suppressed the worship of the true God, having many of His prophets killed, and led a murderous campaign against the prophet Elijah.

Silent Evidence

While hostile critics might claim that these are no more than fictional characters, there is in fact a considerable store of archaeological evidence supporting the historical accuracy of the Bible account. This period is marked by the rise of Assyria (modern day Iraq) as a major power to challenge the might of Egypt. Ahab himself is mentioned in an Assyrian inscription as one of a coalition of kings who halted a major Assyrian advance into Syria in 853 BC, at the famous battle of Qarqar on the Orontes River.

Furthermore archaeologists have excavated the royal palace at Samaria, most probably built by Ahab. It contained the remains of an ‘ivory house’ where a remarkable collection of more than 200 ivory plaques or fragments was found, many with Phoenician styles. Ahab’s fondness for ivory and his ivory house are recorded in his Biblical epitaph:

“Now the rest of the acts of Ahab, and



Fig.1 Decorated seal with Phoenician and Egyptian symbols, bearing the name Jezebel, now in the Israel Museum, Jerusalem

all that he did, and the ivory house which he made, and all the cities that he built, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?" (1 Kings 22:39).

The Prophet Amos too refers to this fondness for ivory in his warning about the judgments that would fall on Ahab's kingdom: "And I will smite the winter house with the summer house; and the houses of ivory shall perish, and the great houses shall have an end, saith the LORD" (Amos 3:15 and see ch.6:4).

A Royal Seal

In 1993 an exciting discovery was made of a seal, decorated with Phoenician and Egyptian symbols and bearing the name of Jezebel (Fig.1). The seal has a hole bored through from top to bottom, presumably so that it could be worn on a chain. Jezebel's name appears on the seal as the Hebrew letters for JZBL (Hebrew is written without vowels) which can be seen in the illustration, arranged around the hawk at lower centre. The seal would have been used by pressing it onto a piece of moistened clay attached to a letter or legal document. The letters are actually inscribed in mirror image so as to appear correct on the impression.

It's fascinating that we have mention of the use of just such a seal in the Bible's account of one of Jezebel's most wicked acts. Ahab her husband wished to acquire a vineyard next to another of his palaces at Jezreel in



Fig.2 Section of the Black Obelisk of the Assyrian king Shalmanezar III, showing Jehu paying tribute. The obelisk is now in the British Museum

order to extend his royal gardens, but Naboth the owner was unwilling to sell his family inheritance. Jezebel sent letters sealed with Ahab's seal, ordering the local officials to arrange a false charge of blasphemy against Naboth and have him executed, which they duly did (1 Kings 21:1-14). His sons were also killed

to make sure there was no one to inherit the vineyard and so prevent Ahab from seizing it (2 Kings 9:26).

A Just End

For this act of villainy, Elijah the prophet was sent to proclaim God's sentence against both Ahab and Jezebel. Ahab duly died in battle against the Syrians (1 Kings 22:35) but a worse fate was decreed for Jezebel. She was to die as the result of the uprising against her son Jehoram, led by the renowned army general Jehu, whose name is still proverbial today for a reckless driver!

It is one of the most dramatic scenes in the Bible (2 Kings 9:1-37). It conjures up:

- ◆ *the cloud of dust as Jehu rides up the valley to Jezreel;*
- ◆ *the arrow fired from his chariot at full speed to despatch Jehoram;*
- ◆ *Jezebel, with the painted face of a priestess, calling out defiance from a window on the city wall;*
- ◆ *Jehu's peremptory command to "throw her down"; and*

- ◆ *the clatter of hooves as he rides over her blood-spattered corpse into the city.*

Archaeology illustrates this story too. Jehu is unique among the kings of Israel in that we possess his picture! The famous Black Obelisk of the Assyrian king Shalmanezar III now in the British Museum, shows Jehu bowing before his overlord and presenting his tribute (Fig.2). And in the excavation of Ahab's palace in Samaria were discovered a number of small cosmetic jars,

perhaps of the very type that the queen used to adorn her face before her death.

It is surely remarkable that this whole section of the Old Testament history of Israel, which might have been dismissed as merely fictional, has been so thoroughly authenticated by the spade of the archaeologist. The stones still "cry out" to confirm the reliability of the Bible and its message.

David Burges

Why Do Problems Come?

The Bible recounts the lives of men and women. Some of them were faithful; some were not. Either way, they had problems in their lives. For that's how it is meant to be.

Jesus was a man who always did God's will. Even when he knew that God's will required him to suffer, Jesus put God's will first. When he was about to be taken to be tried and crucified he said: *"Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done"* (Luke 22:42). Surely, if any man did not deserve to suffer Jesus was that man.

The Bible teaches that not only did God allow Jesus to be murdered but that He was involved in Jesus' death. The apostle Peter said of Jesus: *"Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain"* (Acts 2:23).

The fact is that God arranges events in the lives of believers for their benefit. He is concerned that we

develop characters like that of Jesus. To this end he 'chastens' us as His children. This is explained in these words:

"My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth (Hebrews 12:5-6).

So we see that the one who would serve God must expect events in his life which he would prefer not to happen. It is all too easy to ask 'Why me?' when we are undergoing experiences that we do not like. However we should try to benefit from those experiences, for the apostle continues:

"Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby" (Hebrews 12:11).

Peter Forbes

Have Dominion

God established certain key principles at the very beginning which would work out for good in all human activities, if they were followed. In that sense Adam and Eve were representatives of all humanity and their experiences, for good or ill, would be helpful for all their descendants. Examining the challenge given to them to “have dominion”, **Dudley Fifiield** identifies seven key aspects that should help us understand more about the purpose of God.

*“God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ So God created man in his own image; in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; **have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.**” (Genesis 1:26-28).*

- ❶ Man created very good and made in the image and likeness of God, was intended to reflect God’s glory, to show forth in all its beauty, the splendour of God’s moral excellence.
- ❷ He was God’s representative on earth, appointed to rule on God’s behalf. In this sense he was lord of creation, supreme amongst all that God’s hand had made.
- ❸ Thus to him was given the commission to have dominion over all the works of God’s hands. All the gospel is here. The word ‘dominion’ speaks of sovereignty. It implies a kingdom and surely here, in the very first chapter in Genesis, we have the first reference in Scripture to the Kingdom of God and the foundation principle established as to what that kingdom was to be all about.
- ❹ But man proved himself unworthy of this privilege and responsibility.
- ❺ He broke God’s law and instead of achieving dominion, so that he might rule for God, he himself came under the dominion of sin and death.
- ❻ The very words used in Genesis chapter One to describe the high purpose of the Almighty in man are used in subsequent Scriptures to describe the tyranny and thralldom of sin and death to which all men are subject (see Ps. 19:13; Ps.119:133; Rom. 5:14; 5:17; 5:21; 6:12; 6:14)
- ❼ However, the purpose of God could not be frustrated and the words of Genesis 1:26-28 remain inviolate as a declaration of God’s ultimate intention to carry out His will in man.
- ❼ All Scripture is concerned with the outworking of this purpose, but Psalm 8 is particularly helpful. It appears to be a divine commentary on the words of Genesis.

Psalm 8

- a** The Psalm begins (v 1) and ends (v.9) with the same words “O LORD, our Lord, how excellent is your name in all the earth”. These show that the intervening verses are in fact a prophecy of the day when the declaration of Genesis 1 will finally be fulfilled.
- b** First, David reflects upon the wonders of God’s handiwork –

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? (v 3,4).

It might be thought that, moved by the contemplation of the star-spangled heavens and the immensity of space, David was overwhelmed by the realisation of his own frailty and finiteness. What is man compared with these wonders? But there is more to his thought than this.



He is certainly contrasting the great and marvellous works of God with the apparent insignificance of man. But the feeling of awe, of breathtaking wonder that overwhelmed him, arises from the realisation that it is in man, this frail and transient creature, that the divine purpose is centred: that out of all creation, it is man that God desires to honour above all else. It is to him that God intends to give dominion and it is through him that all the earth will be filled with God’s glory (Numbers 14:21).

“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 over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet” (Psalm 8:5,6).



- c It is a prophecy of the day when the divine commission of Genesis 1 will finally be fulfilled and all will be able to echo the words *“O LORD, our Lord, how excellent is your name in all the earth”*.
- d This work is to be performed through one designated *“the Son of Man”*. He is the one who will be the embodiment of everything that God intended man to be; and it can be a reference to no other than the Lord Jesus Christ. *“Son of man”* is the most used title of the Lord Jesus in the Gospel records, not used by others, but always used by the Lord himself. It is a Messianic title, for not only does it emphasise that he was of Adamic stock, but it also reflects the teaching of Psalm 8 and of other Bible prophecies (see Matthew 24:30; 26:24 with Daniel 7: 9-14).
- e Nevertheless our earlier considerations have established that the grand theme of Psalm 8 is an elaboration upon the words of Genesis Chapter 1, for in the Lord Jesus Christ we see the perfection of manhood. He was one in whom the power of sin was broken, for it had no dominion over him. Death itself could not hold him and, because he ruled himself perfectly, he has proved that he is worthy to rule the world to come, when God’s Kingdom is established on earth. Then he will have dominion over all the works of God’s hands.

Not Yet Fulfilled

That we have not misunderstood the message of these Scriptures is made evident by yet another reference to Psalm 8 and, through the Psalm, to

Genesis 1. It is the writer to Hebrew, or Jewish, believers who says this:

“He has not put the world to come, of which we speak, in subjection to angels. For one testified in a certain place, saying: ‘What is man that you are mindful of him, or the son of man that you take care of him? You made him a little lower than the angels; you crowned him with glory and honour, and set him over the works of your hands. You have put all things in subjection under his feet.’ For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we do not yet see all things put under him ...” (Hebrews 2:5-8).

First the Psalm is quoted, and then the inspired writer comments upon it. We do *“not yet”* see everything made subject to the Lord Jesus Christ because Psalm 8 is a prophecy of what is to happen when Jesus returns as King over the Kingdom of God on earth. Instead, as he goes on to say, Jesus is now in heaven waiting for the time when he will return as King:

“...But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honour, that he, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone” (2:9).

The words of Genesis 1 will be fulfilled in him; and not just in him but in all those who truly believe in him. This gives us all real hope:

“For it was fitting for him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the author of their salvation perfect through sufferings” (Hebrews 2:10).

Dudley Fifiield

Part One

The Trouble caused by Christianity



- ➔ It is perfectly true that conflicts between different factions of Christianity have caused much trouble, war and suffering.
- ➔ You may think Christianity reflects what the Bible says, and that therefore the Bible is to be blamed for all this suffering.
- ➔ You may be surprised to learn that the driving force behind the church gradually changed from Bible teaching to political expediency.

We will show you how in the first few centuries of Christianity:

- ➔ politicians replaced the Bible as the authority in the church
- ➔ belief and practice were guided by politicians and not the Bible

We will also see that the suffering caused by Christianity is a result of politics and not the Bible message,



Sources

To be certain that we have unbiased information, we shall use several independent sources of information to see how Christianity developed. These are:

- ➔ *The Times Atlas of World History*
- ➔ *World History*, published by Geddes & Grosset, which is subtitled "An overview of political, religious and cultural trends"
- ➔ *Chronicle of the World*, published by Longman
- ➔ *The Medieval Church – a brief history*, by Joseph H Lynch published by Longman
- ➔ *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*

What Jesus taught

Before we consider the trouble that Christianity has caused, it may be useful to remind ourselves what Jesus Christ said about dealing with problems. The following are a few verses that reflect his teaching and that of his early followers:

"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also" (Matthew 5:38,39).

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you” (Matthew 5:43,44).

“Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath” (Romans 12:17-19).

“See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all” (1 Thessalonians 5:15).

“Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing” (1 Peter 3:8,9).

The principle cannot be missed! Christians should show love to all people. They should live peaceably and not resist aggressors. Human nature being what it is, they do not always manage to live up to this principle. But that should not stop them trying.

As we look at how the church has developed, we should bear in mind that this principle was taught by the founders of Christianity.

Jesus Christ said that his followers should:

- ➔ show love to all
- ➔ live as peacefully as is possible
- ➔ not resist aggressors

Political influences



The Arch of Constantine in Rome

The book “World History” mentions the political influences on early Christianity. It tells us about the Roman Emperor Constantine who made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire around AD 324:

... Constantine accepted the new Faith. Emperor worship may now have ceased, but even a Christian emperor could not shed the concept that he was the fountain of religion. He declared himself to be the thirteenth apostle and sat as chairman of the Council of Nicea, which established Christian doctrine. This set a precedent for the control of the church by the state.

Talking of the church as it developed at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea, the book tells us:

The emperor maintained Constantine’s position at the head of the church. Patriarchs, bishops and priests lay under his power. Emperors decided doctrine and mercilessly persecuted

many of their subjects who held 'heretical' beliefs.

The book "The Medieval Church – a brief history" tells us that the church has been involved in politics from the fourth century. It makes two interesting statements:

Between the fourth and sixth centuries, Christianity adapted to being a state church. The transition was not always smooth and there were tensions between the claims of the church and of the state that were never fully resolved. In spite of that, the church entered into a close and lasting alliance with the Roman state.

Since the fourth century Roman Empire, the church had been in alliance with rulers, a situation that was reinforced by the important role that some early medieval rulers had played in the conversion of their people.

The same book also shows how deeply the church became involved in

politics:

... the Church was the central institution of the European Middle Ages ... it was a key actor in the high politics of kings and emperors; it ordered the relations of man and woman, the individual and the group, the ruler and the ruled.

- ➔ *The Emperor Constantine became a powerful influence in the church*
- ➔ *The state began to control the church*
- ➔ *Emperors influenced what the church believed*
- ➔ *They persecuted those who disagreed with them*
- ➔ *The church became heavily involved in politics*

Lawrence Cave

Is There A God of Evil?

*In many religions and beliefs there is a concept of an evil God or Gods, who are said to be the cause, in some way, of tragedies, diseases and so forth. In this article **David Caudery** examines Bible teaching to see if this is something that we should believe, or not. He asks us to be persuaded by what the Bible teaches, not by our own preconceptions or superstitions.*

Misunderstandings

It is our conviction that Christianity has been influenced by ideas from other religions and belief systems and that where the words "devil" and "Satan" occur in the Bible, they have been misunderstood. This arises from the widespread impression in the minds of

so many people that a supreme power is the cause of all evil. But there is a problem with such a belief.

If you believe in the omnipotence of God – that He is all powerful and Almighty – as the Bible clearly teaches, to see evil as something that is caused by another deity – a God of Evil – is, in effect, to say that this evil God is far

more powerful and successful than the God who brings Good. This is one of many reasons why we reject the popular understanding that the words “devil” and “Satan” in the Bible refer to an evil God. In past centuries the view was held that Satan was the chief devil and his abode was in the subterranean fires of hell: one can see illustrations depicting this in the stained glass windows of really old churches. The Bible knows nothing about such notions.

Great Creator

Just think about God for a moment. All Christians believe that God is the great Creator, the all-powerful being that is everywhere present by His spirit. King David, in the Old Testament, believed this too; just have a look at the 139th Psalm where he wrote:

“O LORD, you have searched me and known me. You know my sitting down and my rising up; you understand my thought afar off. You comprehend my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word on my tongue, but behold, O LORD, you know it altogether. You have hedged me behind and before, and laid your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain it. Where can I go from your Spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence?” (139:1-7).

There was nowhere that David could go which would take him away from God, something which the fleeing prophet Jonah learned the hard way some years later. Wherever he went, God was still with him; such is the

power of God. He is everywhere present. However, if you believe that the devil of popular imagination is the cause of evil, you have to believe that this evil supernatural being has the same power, and just as many angels! You also have to believe that these devilish angels are able to read men’s thoughts and place temptations in their way and in their thoughts. This is just not true.

If not, then what?

Whenever I make this point I invariably get asked the question: “If the devil is not the cause of making us sin, why do we sin? What is the cause of evil in the world?” The answer to this is something that a lot of people try hard to ignore, because it makes them uncomfortable, but here it is, as the Bible explains it: the heart is the cause of human sin. The Bible declares this very plainly; here’s just one example:

“Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death” (James 1:13-15).

So, you are contradicting the Bible when you say that your wrong thinking and actions are prompted by the devil. You are to blame, and so am I. We are all in the same trouble, once we recognise that we are responsible for sin. We can no longer put the blame on someone or something else. It’s our



problem and we have to face up to it.

Further Support

The Apostle Paul supports what James writes, for example, in his letter to the Romans. In the first chapter he wrote about how men turned away from God and worshipped images of men, birds, animals and reptiles, and sadly people still do this today, in some countries at least. All through the centuries they have done this. In Chapter One of Romans, Paul says what God has done about it – He has allowed them to go their own sinful ways, for the time being. Or, as the apostle Paul expresses it:

*“Therefore **God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonour their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. For this reason **God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, **God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting**” (Romans 1:24-28).*****



Abandoned!

Paul tells us that God gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to passions or desires that they had, and to a base mind. He does not say that mankind has been handed over by God to the control of the devil. What the Bible says, again and again, is that when man turns away

from God his mind becomes increasingly evil. If it becomes focused on human ambitions and desires and God, and godly principles, are left totally out of his thinking.

There is no need to believe that there is a devil that's making him do this; that sort of behaviour is the natural outcome of trying to live without God in one's life. Of course, those who try to live believing in God, also have times of failure. But the more they believe in God and get closer to Him in their thinking, then their times of failure become less and less.

So, what do the words “devil” and Satan” really mean? That is something we will look at in the concluding part of this article, in the next issue.

David Caudery

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Through The Roof



You have probably been to a performance or an event when it could be said that "The applause echoed to the rafters!" or "The cheers went through the roof!"

It could have been like that with the multitudes who thronged to hear Jesus and saw his marvellous works of healing. Whether there were actual cheers and applause we cannot tell, for nothing is said. There would certainly have been delight on the faces of those who were healed and amongst their families and friends. But imagine the surprise on the faces of the crowds when one of those wishing to be healed actually came in through the roof.

No Chance!

The friends of a poor paralytic man tried to approach Jesus to see if he would heal him. His ailment was so far advanced that he needed to be carried on a mat or thin mattress that served as a bed. But the friends could not get near to Jesus for the crowds as he was teaching in a village environment and everybody had crowded around, people coming from far and near.

There was only one option: the houses had flat roofs and it was possible to climb up and walk across the roofs, carrying their paralysed friend! They positioned themselves above the house where Jesus was teaching and, removing part of the roof, they made a big enough hole so that they could lower the sick man down right in front of Jesus. You can read the dramatic

account in Luke chapter 5, verses 17-26. Here's an extract:

"Behold, men brought on a bed a man who was paralysed. And they sought to bring him in and lay him before him. And when they could not find how they might bring him in, because of the crowd, they went up on the housetop and let him down with his bed through the tiling into the midst before Jesus" (5:18,19).

Their Faith

Jesus, we are told, was particularly impressed by their faith. We noted, in an earlier article, that the leper believed that Jesus had the power to heal him: the only question in his mind was whether Jesus would. There was no doubt about that, for, as we read so many times, Jesus was *"moved with compassion"*. However tired he may have been Jesus always did the right thing, in the right way, just at the right time; and he always did it because he had compassion for those who were in need of his healing power.

He may have been tired, grieving about something, even angry, but he was always compassionate. Now, before him was the paralysed man with his four friends gazing down from the rooftop, all of them believing in his power to heal: they knew that the Master would respond to their friend's evident problem and that he would provide what was needed. So they might have been surprised at what Jesus said:

"When he saw their faith, he said to

him, 'Man, your sins are forgiven you'" (5:20).

Forgiveness?

The man needed to be healed so that he could get up and walk, didn't he? But Jesus forgave him his sins! The four friends, and the man himself, might have been perplexed, but the Jewish rulers – who had come from Jerusalem to monitor what was going on – were outraged. They accused Jesus of blasphemy: they didn't say so out loud but that's what they thought and what they were muttering under their breath, into their beards.

"Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

Jesus responded with the challenge:

"Why are you reasoning in your hearts? Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Rise up and walk'?" (5:22,23).

There is hardly any difference in the wording: five words in the first command, four in the second. But is there a difference in effect? Of course there is! Anybody could say *"Your sins are forgiven"* and nobody would know whether that was a valid pronouncement or not. Who is going to know apart from the Lord Jesus Christ and his Father? But to say, *'Rise up and walk'* was a very different thing. When a man's health is restored we can see it in the physical transformation. Nobody would dare say such a thing unless they possessed real power and



authority. And if they had that power from God, then surely they would also have God's authority to forgive sins, which is exactly the point that Jesus now makes:

"But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins' – He said to the man who was paralysed, 'I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house.' Immediately he rose up before them, took up what he had been lying on, and departed to his own house, glorifying God" (5:24,25).

They were all amazed and no wonder! We should be also. I believe that man would have been perfectly happy with the first pronouncement: *'Your sins are forgiven you.'* Wouldn't you? What we should realise is that if we really believe in the promises of God, through the Lord Jesus Christ we can have our sins forgiven too. It is no less a wonder than making a paralytic walk again. It is accomplished, by faith just as readily.

Peace with God

Clearly, if we would receive such a blessing, which speaks of a clear conscience, an inner peace and above all reconciliation with God, then we also need to live a life that testifies to having received such a blessing. Our life should glorify God. We may not see miracles performed, but we should know that by placing our lives in the hands of Jesus Christ we are in a position to receive spiritual healing. What the physical miracle of healing did – the one every one could see – was to prove beyond all doubt that the miracle of forgiveness could also be performed by Jesus. It is interesting to note the reaction of the people who were present:

“They were all amazed, and they glorified God and were filled with fear, saying, ‘We have seen strange things today!’” (Luke 5:26).

There was a whole mix of emotions here. For some what they had seen was a cause for fear; some would have resented what Jesus had claimed to do, even denying the evidence of their own eyes. For some it was all a “seven day wonder” and they would soon fail to be moved by what they had experienced. But what about us, as we think about these issues? Will we go on our way glorifying God, for the rest of our lives?

Sick with Sin

The doctor’s surgery used to be a most interesting place – as everyone sat around waiting their turn to see the doctor. It was a gathering of those who definitely were ill, those who thought they were,

and those who thought they might avoid work by pretending to be ill. One thing was very clear: the truly healthy would not go near the place. In answer to the complaints of the Scribes and Pharisees when Jesus was seen to be mixing with tax collectors and sinners Jesus said:

“Those who are well do not need a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance” (Luke 5:31,32).

Those Scribes and Pharisees, the self-righteous, were people who thought they knew all they needed to know to have a satisfactory relationship with God; they thought they knew all about His law and how to keep it. They thought others, like the tax collectors, really were beyond help and that God could not possibly have any interest in them. Jesus had a different view. He had come to help all those people who knew they weren’t spiritually healthy and who would come to him for help. He could heal, and he still can. Jesus can heal our deep spiritual and moral needs: he alone can forgive our sins. Sin separates us from God but, like the sick in Jesus’ day, if

we recognise we have a problem we will go to one person who might be able to help. Jesus is the one person who can.

New Life

What about those Scribes and Pharisees? Would they ever go to the doctors? What about us, do we really understand our need? Would we really resort to Jesus? Would we take his

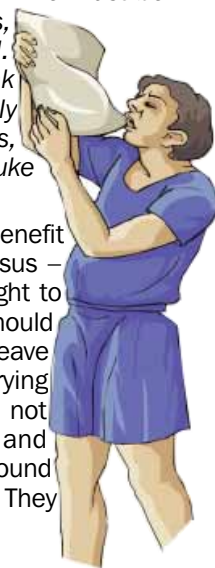


instruction as we might from the doctor? Unfortunately we all have baggage accumulated from the lives we 'normally' live. It has to be got rid of and we are reluctant to do it – like the inveterate smoker when he is told he has lung cancer. Jesus put it this way:

“He spoke a parable to them: ‘No one puts a piece from a new garment on an old one; otherwise the new makes a tear, and also the piece that was taken out of the new does not match the old. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine will burst the wineskins and be spilled, and the wineskins will be ruined. But new wine must be put into new wineskins, and both are preserved. And no one, having drunk old wine, immediately desires new; for he says, ‘The old is better’” (Luke 5:36-39).

If we really want to benefit from the teaching of Jesus – the good news he brought to us – then we really should realise that we need to leave the old stuff behind. Trying to patch things up will not do. The Pharisees and Scribes in particular found that impossible to do. They were so sure that –

- ❖ *their lives were OK;*
- ❖ *there were no tears in their garments;*
- ❖ *they needed no new ideas (about things like faith, love and grace);*
- ❖ *they had no need of either new wine or new bottles.*



Challenging Words

We have to realise that we need new garments and new wine in new bottles. We have to make a fundamental change in the way we approach life: in fact we need a new life. The apostle Paul, writing later on in the New Testament, talked about a change of garments when he spoke of *'putting off the old man and putting on the new'*. He was speaking about putting on the Lord Jesus Christ, just as we might put on a new coat. But we wouldn't put on a new coat, before first taking off the old one! (See Colossians 3: 1-10.)

Some of the things Jesus said were both challenging and uncompromising. If we went to the doctor and he told us that we were seriously ill, he might also say that there was only one course of action that would cure our condition. What would you do then? Trust him, of course, and follow his direction. He is, after all, the expert.

It is the same with the Lord Jesus Christ. We have to listen to his voice and trust him absolutely, for he knows precisely what he is talking about. If we want the cure for sin, it is folly to ignore what he says. He is offering us eternal health: life that will last forever.

David Nightingale

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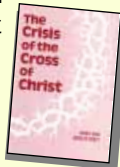


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Harry Tennant

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