

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1517



"The Old is Better" – page 3

God's Plumbline – page 5

Three Different Men – page 16

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OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

124th Year

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1517



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

Its objectives are – to encourage the study of the Bible as God's inspired message to mankind; to call attention to the Divine offer of forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ; and to warn men and women that soon Christ will return to Earth as judge and ruler of God's world-wide Kingdom.

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

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 – Geoff Maycock, 8 Hale End,
Bracknell, Berks., England, RG12 9YH
gmaycock@uwclub.net

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

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Contents

"The Old is Better"3

God's Plumblineline5

World Out of Control..9

**A Christian Conscience.
.....12**

**The Amazing Flagellum
.....14**

Three Different Men.16

Paul Before Festus18

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“The Old is Better”

Wherever you go in the world there are always people trying to sell you souvenirs – postcards, photographs, paintings, mugs, teaspoons – you know the sort of thing. The items differ from place to place but they are essentially the same: cheap objects which are not intended to last long, but which remind you and your friends of where you have been.

The shops on this month’s front cover are in Jerusalem and create an instructive comparison. The objects for sale are typical products of the 21st century while the market place itself is an ancient structure the paving stones of which have been worn down by the feet of many people who have passed that way throughout the centuries. The sellers and their wares will die sooner or later but the buildings will stay to house the products of another generation after them, and then another.

Short-Lived

This is an instructive comparison because it reminds us of our own existence on earth. The places where we live will have been occupied before by people or animals that are long gone. And unless something radical happens the same land will be occupied again. Our houses might be demolished or rebuilt; our possessions will wear out and be thrown away. After a while there may be nothing left of us at all, except perhaps in the memory of some people somewhere, and even that memory will eventually expire. But the earth

will go on without us and new people will occupy it and enjoy it in their particular way. You might think that there is nothing we can do about it. But you would be wrong.

It doesn’t have to be like that, unless you want it to be. There is a way of ensuring that your existence is prolonged and that you occupy the earth forever. That’s the offer God makes to each of us, in the Bible. For the shortness and frailty of human existence is something that people have thought about through the centuries and many have written about it. The Psalmist of Israel once summed up human existence like this:

Wise men die; likewise the fool and the senseless person perish, and leave their wealth to others. Their inner thought is that their houses will last forever, their dwelling places to all generations; they call their lands after their own names. Nevertheless man, though in honour, does not remain; he is like the beasts that perish (Psalm 49:10–12).

Choices

Jesus told a parable about people who were averse to change because they were comfortable with what they knew and were uncomfortable with anything new. This is what he said:

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).

Two Parables

There are in fact two parables here which have been combined together and each one is worth examining carefully, for they teach several different lessons. First, Jesus explains that you can't patch an old garment with a piece of brand new cloth – one that hasn't even been washed. The piece of new cloth will be too strong for the worn out garment and the whole will soon tear. If you are going to patch you need a piece of cloth of similar age and wear. But do you really need to patch a frayed old garment? Wouldn't it be better to have something new?

His second observation is about an old wineskin which, once again, is at the end of its life. In its worn-out state it is not capable of coping with the fermentation pressures that would be exerted by new wine. Subject to that stress and strain it is likely to burst. If you have some new wine to store, Jesus says, you need a new wineskin as that will match the age of the wine itself.

Yet, says Jesus, people are usually reluctant to try new wine as they are inclined to stick to what they know. Although he did not express regret as such, it is clear that he was sad that human nature is like that. For consider the two parables again. Jesus did not come to mend a way of worshipping God that was now threadbare and

ready to be thrown out. He has brought a new way of covering human sinfulness – one which did not patch the old but which replaces all that had gone before. Elsewhere in Scripture the covering that Jesus makes available is called a 'robe of righteousness'.

And he brought the taste of forgiveness for all those who come to God through him, expressed in the parable as a 'new wine'. His teaching is not compatible with a person's old way of living and thinking. Drink this new wine and you need to become a new person. Yet, sadly, many people are content with their way of doing things and they will not follow Jesus and be guided by his teaching. They say 'the old is better' and have forgotten that as they become old they are one step nearer the grave and eternal oblivion.

New People

Jesus wants new people for his new world; for he is returning from heaven to rule on earth and will raise from the dead all those believing people who died expecting his return. And he will call to him all those faithful believers who are still alive and will change them so they can spend eternity on earth with him when the Kingdom of God is established here. That is the great invitation the Bible extends to us and we have to make a fundamental choice. Do we think that our present way of life is good enough for us, even if it means that we will miss out on all the great things that are due to happen? Or do we think that, all things considered, the new opportunity is better? If so, reading the Bible for yourself should be a top priority to find out what God wants you to do and how He wants you to change.

Editor

The Authority of God in His Word

God's Plumbline

Some people have a good eye for seeing if things are level. A few feel they have to make corrections and true-up a skewed picture on their wall or others' walls!

Those who hang wallpaper or lay bricks need a reliable means to check their work. A plumbline has been used for thousands of years for building straight and true walls. This simple weight with a pointed base hanging on a cord gives the worker a fixed reference point.

The complete reliability of the plumbline is based on gravity, a precise and constant force giving weight to objects and a repeatable rate of descent to the earth. God made the universe with all its laws enabling the simple and accurate weighing of things. Scientists need intricate and detailed calculations to send spacecraft into orbit and return them safely to earth. The thousands of daily passenger flights are all possible because aircraft instruments can be reliably calibrated to the earth's constant gravitational pull. We take all this for granted!

God's Laws for His People

The infinite Creator prepared these natural laws so we can rely on them. He also established trustworthy laws for man's healthy living; these are set out in His Word the Bible. The amazing regulations given to Moses enabled

the Jews to deal with issues contrary to healthy living. Cross-infection was controlled and now our modern methods can be traced back to God's Word. Successful animal husbandry and sensible foods are clearly described. When God's people followed these ways they thrived and were admired by the surrounding nations.

God also set out his code for healthy spiritual living within this law. The Ten Commandments involved a proper way to respect and worship God and live in harmony with each other. When the Jews followed this way of life God truly blessed them with good

health and abundant harvests. Listen to these words about God's law:

Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the Lord our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? (Deuteronomy 4:6-7).

Notice how the people were required to keep the commands, and then they would be wise and understanding. As part of this way of life they regularly prayed to God for His help in their personal lives. The law God had established was His plumbline by which He would judge His people.



Coming Judgement

As the years slipped by the Jews wondered if life would be more exciting if they mingled with the surrounding nations. God warned them that punishment would come on them should they follow the idolatrous practices of the heathen. About 760 BC despite many warnings for over 600 years God sent Amos to prophesy about coming judgement by the Assyrians on the surrounding nations and then on Israel if they didn't mend their ways. God used the picture of a plumbline:



This is what he showed me: behold, the Lord was standing beside a wall built with a plumb line, with a plumb line in his hand. And the Lord said to me, 'Amos, what do you see?' And I said, 'A plumb line.' Then the Lord said, 'Behold, I am setting a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel; I will never again pass by them; the high places of Isaac shall be made desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste, and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword' (Amos 7:7-9).

In the vision God was seen holding His plumbline by a stone wall; the city seemed well protected by this sturdy and well-built wall. But God told them if they didn't measure up to His standard they were destined for destruction. So it didn't matter if their man-made security was strong, God was foretelling them that they had

failed His moral code. They were 'out of true' when tested with the Divine plumb-line, and all their man-made protections were no match for the invading armies bringing God's judgements on their cities.

Living Plumbline

The Lord Jesus Christ is the very core of God's purpose with the natural creation and its final redemption into God's New World. God's Son was upright in every respect. His life and teaching are absolutely true. In John's gospel Jesus said:

I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit (John 15:1-2).

We too can become true by Christ's standard, if we follow his ways and accept the salvation in the gospel he taught. By nature we are 'out of true' with God because of our sin. If we remain this way we are lost. God sent His son as the 'Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world'. The secret to entering God's coming kingdom on earth is to believe in the whole work of the Lord Jesus Christ and then accept his victory over sin by repenting and being baptized.

Coming King

When the king of righteousness comes again to rule this world, we can be found standing upright clothed with the

robes of righteousness that Christ provides. By God's grace we will be judged true by him. Here is a promise for every one of us:

If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love (John 15:10).

The Lord Jesus was described as the 'Word made flesh'. This means that he fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies about his life and message. He is the living Son of God and now acts as mediator and high priest for his followers. He expects us to grasp hold of the gospel of the coming Kingdom of God on earth and to prepare our hearts for his return. The Lord Jesus Christ is God's standard by whom his servants will be measured. We need to align our lives and faith to be prepared to meet him. As Jesus says:

This is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent (John 17:3).

The regular intake of the Bible message will help to refine our hearts to welcome the coming King of the world.

Measuring Up

The Bible is the only reliable source of discovering God's purpose with the world. It is in harmony with history and archaeology. Many predictions the Bible makes have already been completed with astounding accuracy. Some prophecies are still in process of fulfilment.

Nebuchadnezzar the great king of Babylon was given a stunning dream



by God. He saw a great metal image of a man with feet of iron and clay. A stone came and toppled the image and ground it to powder. The stone then grew into a great mountain and filled the whole earth. The interpretation which Daniel received from God he told to the king. Nebuchadnezzar was the head of gold and his empire was to be followed by a succession of inferior human empires finally to be replaced by God's Kingdom on earth:

... And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever (Daniel 2:44).

This is the real solution to all our world's terrible problems. God's kingdom on earth is the time when His saints will be given immortality and share the blessings of eternity. We can have total confidence that the Lord Jesus Christ's rulership over this world will be absolutely just and enforceable. He has already demonstrated his complete trustworthiness and total obedience to his Father's will. The gospel Jesus preached is clear, straightforward and true, and we can share its delights. Just imagine life free from worry, sickness, violence, pain, immorality, wars and even death. The curse of all human suffering imposed on creation due to Adam and Eve's sin will be completely lifted. God's kingdom will be a wonderful new world full of lasting peace, harmony and fruitfulness. God imposed death as a

punishment for sin. But the Lord Jesus Christ conquered the power of sin, pain and death through his own death and resurrection.

Personal Challenge

When we understand the true gospel and want to be part of God’s coming Kingdom we will express our personal faith and commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ. When some questioned Jesus’ authority he said this:

“Have you never read in the Scriptures: ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the corner-stone; this was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes’? Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits” (Matthew 21:42–43).

Our challenge is to read the Scriptures, understand its message of hope and then faithfully act upon it by being baptized into the saving name of Jesus. We must not be like the Jews in the Lord’s time, many of whom lost their opportunity of salvation. Most of the nation were scattered worldwide. This brutal dispersion was Bible prophecy being fulfilled. Clear Bible teaching about the return of the Jews to Israel with their national identity again established was fulfilled only 62 years ago (in 1948).

But their challenge is now the same as ours: to be ready for the Lord Jesus when he returns. Jesus said this about those people who persistently refuse to submit to his authority as described in the Bible:

I tell you, many will come from east

and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 8:11–12).

The standard has been set by the plumbline – God’s Truth in the Lord Jesus Christ. The final judgement will be when the stone grinds to powder all the wicked and unfaithful and leaves a

beautiful world filled with people blessed with immortality serving the Lord God and His Son forever more.

Do take this opportunity to read God’s Word the Bible, and test out your faith and beliefs using the true bench-mark, God’s plumbline in the Lord Jesus Christ. The blessings in store in God’s Kingdom on earth will be so marvellous that our limited human minds can only just glimpse

with wonder!

Andrew Tennant

All quotations are from the English Standard Version of the Bible



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www.gladtidingsmagazine.org



World Out of Control

*In this review of world affairs from a Biblical viewpoint **Andrew White** is seeking to show that things have now got to a stage when they are uncontrollable by any human government of whatever political persuasion. Only one power can resolve things and re-establish true morality and that huge change requires the Coming of Jesus to re-establish God's Kingdom on earth.*

Increase in Violence

In many parts of the world violence has erupted. Major wars are being fought against an enemy that no longer stands and fights. For terrorists have discovered that the 'hit and run' technique is much more effective and far harder for conventional forces to fight against.

It also means that nowhere is safe from the possibility of attack by people with idealistic intent to disrupt and reshape society in accordance with their view of how things should be. Many of these attacks are undertaken by religious people, many of whom are willing to sacrifice their own lives for the cause they believe in. But it is a strange religion indeed that believes in killing thousands of innocent people in order to establish a new society.

But this disregard for the rule of law runs even deeper than that. There is a widespread disregard for laws that are supposed to protect society in general. The majority of parents are no longer able to control their offspring who have no respect for parental authority and

this attitude can be seen in society in general where young people get high on drugs or alcohol and become virtually unmanageable.

Root Cause

That sort of behaviour begs the question, why? The answer is relatively simple and we only have to look at the western cultures over the last 50 years. After the Second World War society changed rapidly with deterrent laws being liberalised and discipline relaxed. Children of the 60's, as they are often referred to, grew up in a society revolutionised by pop culture, liberated by the new age of 'sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll'.

These children are now parents and grandparents of a society that has witnessed a huge moral decline.

Marriage for life is no longer seen as the serious commitment it once was and adultery seems to have been the favourite pastime in a lot of failed relationships. Divorce rates in Britain are the highest in the western world and so too are teenage pregnancies. Sexually transmitted disease is almost at



epidemic proportions and is affecting even newborn babies.

Liberated?

Such 'liberated' attitudes and freedoms from codes of conduct have reaped an evil tide of depravity which continues to get worse year by year. These tragic conditions are now spreading to other areas of the world and most governments are powerless to act. Long ago the Bible described the sort of society that would exist just before the return of the Lord Jesus to establish God's Kingdom on earth, for God is going to take over world rulership and put all these wrong things right. Notice how these words which are nearly 2000 years old read as though they were a commentary on 21st century society.

But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away! For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth (2 Timothy 3:1-7).

Failing Remedies

Some people think that the way to

improve things is to make punishment more severe and thus to deter people from committing atrocities. There does seem to be a connection between softer punishment and greater crime. For when capital punishment was removed in the UK murders increased. Nowadays a life sentence is 25 years and with remission that means that a murderer will generally only serve 16 years, and that for taking another person's life! Recently in northern England an enraged killer took the lives of 12 innocent people while a number of seriously injured victims suffered horrific injuries. It is indeed a very sad world. But the prisons of the world are full and the economic problems being faced means that governments are trying to release more people because it is too expensive to keep them imprisoned for a long time.

Other people think that more legislation is the answer so more and more prohibitive statutes are appearing to try to establish right from wrong. Members of the European Union have both the laws of their own countries to protect (or prohibit) them *and* European legislation.

This has further confused and weakened the situation, for the European Bill of Human Rights superseded many laws that were based loosely upon God's Ten Commandments, laws that had protected society from obscene acts of sexual depravity that God Himself totally forbids. Now attitudes and behaviour based on human preferences take precedence over God's Law in our more affluent and liberal world. You can work out for yourself the result of man's stupidity in ignoring God.

Behaviour that God has declared shameful and abominable is now more than acceptable: they are also protected by society. That Bill of Human

Rights can allow the perpetrator of evil acts to be treated as a victim and on many occasions the victim appears to suffer more than the offender, who can literally get away with murder. God is a God of justice and true judgement and whilst He has allowed the world to 'go its own way' and 'do its own thing' for two millennia, that situation is about to come to an end.

Divine Remedy

This is what the apostle Paul explained would happen when the time is right. First he explained that God was giving

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; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practise such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practise them (Romans 1:28-32).

mankind the time to sort itself out, for three times he says that "God gave them up" (Romans 1:24,26,28):

Then he explains that there will come a day of reckoning, adding that we now have the opportunity to take notice of God's laws and His gracious offer of salvation:

Do you think this, O man, you who judge those practising such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who "will render to each one according to his deeds" (Romans 2:3-6).

Follow God's Law

Having described with absolute accuracy the way that human society would deteriorate in these last days, the apostle Paul went on to urge his readers to choose God's way by reading and obeying His law. There can be no better recommendation, then or now:

But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. 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 3:13-17).

Andrew White

A Christian Conscience

*In the first part of this series **Dennis Gillett** explained what conscience is, describing it as a God-given mechanism which enables us to determine what is right and what is wrong. It is not an inbuilt arbiter of right and wrong but a facility that enables us to apply right judgement once we have the proper information. An ill-informed conscience can take us in the wrong direction. Now he explains what constitutes a Christian conscience.*

Conscience can be affected by all kinds of forces. Let me remind you of some of the ways in which the conscience is generally referred to. It is sometimes said that conscience can “bear a witness” or “give testimony”.

Different Sorts

Things are said to be done “for conscience sake”. The Bible reflects some of those ideas for in the New Testament conscience is described as “good”, as “void of offence”, or as “pure as toward God”. But it is also described as “weak”, as “seared”, as “defiled” and as “evil”. Finally, and most hopefully, we read there that conscience can be cleansed.

We have seen that conscience is a mechanism which can be attuned to a set of moral standards, or which can be neglected and overridden at an individual’s choice. Ignore it for long enough and it will cease to work as its Maker intended, just as any mechanism will fail through neglect or persistent misuse. So what is a “Christian conscience” and how would it differ from one which has been programmed by some other set of moral values?



Christian Conscience

A Christian conscience, quite evidently, must be one which has been instructed by the teaching of Christ; by the pure doctrine of the Word of God and by the faithful testimony of the truth. So for the disciple it is essential that the conscience is constantly corrected and readjusted by these forces. We have seen already that otherwise it may become weak, seared, defiled, desensitised. Evidently a conscience which is not working properly can lead a disciple astray.

Weak consciences are not clear in the apprehension of what God regards as good and evil. They are not quick in discerning the fear of the Lord. Remember that if any disciple is to make a stand on the ground of conscience, he or she should have the ability to give a reason for the faith which drives his conscience to make that stand. It is no part of the properly instructed conscience to declare something “wrong” when it is quite evidently “right”, nor to approve as “good” that which is unmistakably “bad” – according to God’s Word.

Although the Apostle Paul was ready and willing to respect the conscience of

some first century believers who had difficulties about eating and drinking or those who wished to give special place to a particular day, he was never willing for the individual conscience to violate a divinely true principle: something which he regarded as essential to the Truth of God. He could be very tolerant about certain non-essential issues, but very insistent about things that he regarded as essential.

Two Examples

↘ Non-Essentials

In the ancient world many eating places were associated with places of pagan worship as much business was done in temple dining rooms. Some believers thought it was best to have nothing to do with such places as the food would ceremonially have been offered to idols. Others took the view that as idols do not exist, any such ceremony was meaningless and it was all right to eat the food and to go to such places. Here is the advice given by the apostle:

Eat whatever is sold in the meat market, asking no questions for conscience' sake; for 'the earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness'. If any of those who do not believe invites you to dinner, and you desire to go, eat whatever is set before you, asking no question for conscience' sake. But if anyone says to you, 'This was offered to idols,' do not eat it for the sake of the one who told you, and for conscience' sake; for 'the earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness' (1 Corinthians 10:25–28).



Here Paul takes the view that there is really nothing wrong about eating such meat, for idols do not exist, so it means nothing if the meat has been offered to them (1 Corinthians 8:4), but if that offends other believers his advice is that it is best to avoid such practices in case it damages the faith of others. He goes on to say that if the eating of meat causes offence to others, he will become a vegetarian (8:13).

↘ Essentials

But here's a quite different example where, for conscience's sake, the apostle says that he will allow no compromise with his convictions. Some people required, as a matter that they said was vital for salvation, that Gentile converts must be circumcised, following a Jewish precedent. Paul had consistently been arguing that a believer is saved by faith, not by works, and that circumcision was thus no longer necessary.

See how he dealt with this issue:

Yet not even Titus who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised. And this occurred because of false brethren secretly brought in (who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage), to whom we did not yield submission even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you (Galatians 2:3–5).

Quite likely those who wanted to impose circumcision were acting conscientiously – their conscience told them it was necessary. But Paul would not give way to the niceties of some-

body's conscience on this occasion because it was denying a fundamental teaching of the gospel. A principle was being violated and no man's conscience may do that without being resisted.

Right from Wrong

So there it is. A Christian conscience, primed and instructed by the teaching of Christ, will tell us when we do right and will warn us when we do wrong and will urge us always to do right, as we rightly understand it. Such a conscience is an individual force in human nature. It will protest when we act impurely; when we lie; when we are dishonest and when we are unjust. It will give us no rest when we depart from the solemn will of God. In cases where human judgement has to be

exercised it may lead us to disagree with our fellows. It is sometimes a mysterious thing, but in the end we have to obey it if we seek to be true and desire to find peace.

The one thing is to keep it pure, strong and void of offence. Keep it well primed by the Truth; let it be mastered by love. A conscience which is directed by love is the best driving force for the race that is set before us. In the next article in this series we will examine how to apply such a conscience to a situation where the law of Christ runs contrary to the law of the land and thus explain why Christadelphians consistently claim exemption from military service.

Dennis Gillett

The Amazing Flagellum

The reason why our hired motor-boat had stopped moving was that the propeller was completely clogged with seaweed. The reliable single cylinder put-put engine was still running but we were stationary. The only remedy was to hang over the stern and clear the propeller of the blockage.

With these common type of small motor-boats, the water-cooled engine is situated somewhere in the middle, and is coupled to a rotating shaft, supported by 2 bearings. It pokes out through the stern via a waterproof gland, and has the propeller fixed on the end.



It is a neat arrangement, but each component must be in place for the boat to proceed. Although clearing the propeller is a common problem, an engine failure, a broken shaft or coupling, a smashed bearing or a lost propeller, makes progress impossible. These can be repaired, but one could not even begin a voyage if any one of those parts was to be missing; which brings us to the bacterial flagellum.



It is only with the advent of very high powered microscopes that scientists have come to know that some species of flagella can propel themselves along, inside the body of living organisms, by a mechanism not dissimilar to that of the boat propeller-drive. It sounds incredible, but it is absolutely true. The bacterial flagellum swims along by means of a propeller in the form of a single rotating whip-like tail, on the end of a shaft, which is supported by two bearings, in the cell walls. It is driven by an acid motor within the cell, which can rotate at speeds up to 17000 rpm. Like the boat mechanism, the cell could not be propelled if any one of those parts was missing.

The theory of evolution teaches that life began with a very primitive cell that appeared on earth by some freak chance, and slowly, over millions of years, developed into more complex forms of life, to the many highly-complex forms of life that we see around us today.

But consider the following. For this to happen, the very first new life-form had to survive on a totally barren planet, and also have the built-in ability to divide into two and reproduce itself. At some early stage, it also needed to acquire information, in order for the DNA molecule to work;

which is the mechanism of biological inheritance in nearly all living creatures.

So it is hardly scientific to propose that all this complexity happened by some incredible accident.

The flagellum mechanism, alone, shows that the tiniest of cells are by no means simple. Nor can it be explained how it could have slowly evolved, to permit it to swim, as it does. Just like the boat mechanism, unless all the components of the flagellum happened at the same time, it just could not possibly work. It is what is termed irreducibly complex. There is absolutely no allowance for evolutionary development.

We cannot deny that the propeller drive on the boat shows an obvious designer. But, just take, for example, the miniscule rotating acid-motor of the flagellum. For it to rotate at 17000 rpm, depends entirely on its tiny, but accurately, assembled components, all neatly in the right place. Is it not impossible to believe that such a device could be built by chance forces? And all this, before we even think about adding the shaft; the bearings, and the propeller.

For it to function so efficiently, as it obviously does, all the parts of the bacterial flagellum would have to be created together. This surely points to an intelligent designer, and such a designer can only be God. The Psalmist in the Bible says:

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).

Malcolm Edwards

Three Different Men

Government Minister

He was a man in a position of considerable authority. Today we would say that he was 'The Chancellor of the Exchequer' in a royal court – in fact, in the court of Candace Queen of the Ethiopians. Yet it is very clear from "The Acts of the Apostles" in the New Testament that he was a very religious man.

He had been on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and was returning home. It was a long and difficult journey which he made in what was probably some sort of canopied four wheeled conveyance. When we meet him, he had stopped for refreshment and was reading from the Old Testament. We said he was a religious man and he was especially interested in the faith of the Jews.

The evangelist Philip came to him on God's instruction and asked this government minister if he understood what he was reading. The humility of the man is astounding: He said,

"How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him (Acts 8:31).

Philip began at the very passage from which the Ethiopian was reading from the Old Testament and told him about the



good news of the great self-sacrifice and wonderful resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. The Ethiopian was so moved that he immediately confessed his faith and asked for baptism. So here is a religious man of considerable importance in his country's affairs having the humility to realize that his

secular importance was as nothing compared with his need for salvation from sin and death and for baptism into Christ, You can read the full story of this man in Acts chapter 8.

Religious Fanatic

The next man at whom we shall briefly look was a member of an elite sect of the Jews. He was a scholarly Pharisee, a learned man who became a religious fanatic determined to stamp out once and for all what he saw as the heresy of Christianity. He had the power and authority to do just as he thought right. Yet he had to learn, much against his will at first, that sincerity was not enough and can even be misdirected! Only a highly dramatic experience would turn this man round.

We can read about this experience in chapter 9 of



the Acts of the Apostles. We can also go on to read in that same book how he became the apostle to the Gentiles and of the work which he did over many years to bring the gospel to so many in different parts of the Roman world. Yes, he too, religious man that he was, came to realize that he needed to be baptized into the Saving Name of Jesus. And it all happened because he encountered the risen and glorious Lord Jesus as he travelled to Damascus. His was the first Damascus Road conversion!

Roman Centurion

The last of our three different men was a Roman centurion. We can read about him in that very same book of the New Testament at chapter 10. To say he was a “good man” is a bit of an understatement.

He was devout, generous to a fault and a man of prayer. Surely he would be accepted by God because of the man that he

was. His name was Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian Regiment, so he was a Gentile.

The apostle Peter – the apostle to the Jews – was sent to him by God with this message ringing in his ears: *What God has cleansed you must not call common* (Acts 10:15).

As a result of that visit and his meeting with Cornelius the apostle Peter came to learn that God was opening the door of faith to the Gentiles, as well as to the Jews. So

Peter spoke to Cornelius about salvation in Christ and he too was baptized.

Lessons for Us

We can learn from the examples of these three men. None of them was “a nobody” by man’s estimation for they all held positions of authority in their differing capacities. Yet however powerful a person might be, however feared or well thought of, however religious, however kind and thoughtful for others, however generous or self-effacing, all of these things are as nothing.

All of us, without distinction, need to come face to face with the Lord Jesus

Christ and, like these men of old, confess our own unworthiness and our sins, and be baptized into his Saving Name.

Baptism means being buried in water as a symbolic way of expressing death to our old nature – related to sin, disease and death – and by rising from that water we symbolize the start of a new life in Christ related to righteousness

by faith, spiritual health and a newness of life. When that takes place we will, through our own experience, understand these life-giving words of the apostle Paul:

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 (Galatians 3:27–28).

Trevor A. Pritchard



Paul before Festus

Now a prisoner in Caesarea, the apostle Paul had to explain the circumstances that had led to his arrest and answer Jewish accusations that he was the ringleader of an insurrection. He made an initial defence of his position before the Roman Governor Felix but, as **John Hellawell** now explains, that did not resolve the situation and he remained a prisoner.

Felix Again

A few days after his trial Felix and his wife Drusilla sent for Paul. Perhaps she was curious to see Paul having, no doubt, heard about him. Paul spoke to them about his faith in the Lord Jesus. After he had demonstrated that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah, Paul explained the consequences of such a belief in terms of personal behaviour.

In particular, he spoke about the need for righteousness, self-control and the coming judgement. These matters would cause some concern on the part of Felix; he and his wife would find themselves condemned by what Paul said. So Paul was dismissed:

Now as he reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and answered, 'Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you' (Acts 24:25).

How often since then have those sentiments been repeated by people who said that they would think about it later! Felix may have been fearful of what Paul had been saying but he was also hopeful that Paul would offer him a bribe to be released! So he sent for him frequently, but no bribe was forthcoming. Felix had noted that Paul's



visit to Jerusalem was to provide financial support for the poor. He may have reasoned that Paul would have access to other wealth: perhaps his companions would contribute to a 'ransom'?

Felix Replaced

This situation continued for two further years. Then Felix was replaced. He had quelled riots between Greeks and Jews and confiscated valuable Jewish property. The Jews complained to Nero and Felix was recalled to stand trial. In order to try to placate the Jews somewhat, Felix left Paul in prison. Felix was replaced by Porcius Festus.

Just three days after his arrival in the Province, Festus went up from his headquarters in Caesarea to Jerusalem. No doubt this was intended as a goodwill gesture in order to avoid the sort of problems which had ultimately led to the downfall of Felix. Even after two years, the chief priests and other members of the Sanhedrin were just as keenly concerned to have Paul punished and, preferably, to ensure his execution. This indicates how intensely they hated him.

So they made their request to Festus to have Paul transferred back to Jerusalem for trial, intending to renew their attempt to assassinate him (see Acts 23:15). If, as seems likely, having newly arrived, Festus would not suspect their intentions and, therefore,

would not provide a guard of the size which the experienced Claudius Lysias had indicated would be necessary to combat Jewish fanaticism. These factors would assist their assassination attempts.

Festus was not to be persuaded. No doubt he had been informed (by his own staff) that Paul was a Roman citizen. Accordingly he insisted that, since Paul was already in custody at his headquarters and he was about to return there soon, the trial would be conducted there. It is also probable that Festus wished to assert his authority and insist that Roman practice be followed, especially since the earlier trial had been held in Caesarea. It is also possible that Festus had been briefed by his own staff that an attempt had been made on Paul's life already: the letter from Claudius Lysias may well have been 'on file'.

Retrial

Festus did, however, indicate his willingness to arrange a re-trial if some of the Jewish hierarchy were prepared to present their case. His final comment, "if he has done anything wrong" suggests that Festus was suspicious of their motives and certainly was not willing to accept their accusations without evidence. This suspicion is confirmed by his later disclosure to Herod Agrippa:

... about whom the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me, when I was in Jerusalem, asking for a judgment against him. To them I answered, 'It is not the custom of the Romans to deliver any man to destruction before the accused meets the

accusers face to face, and has opportunity to answer for himself concerning the charge against him' (Acts 25:15–16).

Trial before Festus

After spending eight or ten days in Jerusalem, Festus returned to Caesarea and, without delay, he convened the court to try Paul on the following day. This suggests that the High Priest and other members of the Sanhedrin travelled back to Caesarea with Festus. The 'serious complaints' (25:7), which are not specified by Luke, may be inferred from Paul's defence as relating to the Law, the Temple and against Caesar. Once more, his accusers were unable to substantiate them. Paul's defence was to refute the unsupported charges. This should have been sufficient to lead to a dismissal of the case and Paul's acquittal.

However, Festus seems to have decided that he would use the opportunity to get his term as Procurator off to a good start by acquiescing to the earlier suggestion of the Jewish hierarchy that a trial in Jerusalem was appropriate. This change of mind was undoubtedly a political tactic. From what Festus had heard before the trial it was possible that Paul was a serious threat to Rome and social stability. Having listened to the accusations he was now assured that Paul constituted no such threat to Rome, or to law and order. The issues were purely religious and, therefore, of no consequence.

By making this gesture perhaps he thought that he could ingratiate himself with the Jews and put them in his debt.

John Hellowell

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