

Glad Tidings

Of The Kingdom Of God



Featured Articles

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All Things Work for Good (p. 5)

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A monthly magazine written and 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 humankind; to call attention to the divine offer of forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ; and to warn people that soon Christ will return to earth as judge and ruler of God's worldwide Kingdom.

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Angels

HAVE YOU EVER SEEN an angel? You may have, and not been aware of it.

They look like people. *'Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares'* (Hebrews 13:2). The writer of Hebrews may be referring to Abraham and Sarah (the account is in Genesis 18). Their grandson Jacob spent an entire night wrestling with an angel (Genesis 32:22–32). But angels can also appear in different forms. They're often associated with fire (for example Exodus 3:2). The prophet Balaam encountered an angel who was invisible until he wanted to be seen (Numbers 22:22–35).

Actually it's not that angels look like us, it's that we look like angels. The angels were instrumental in the creation of the world (Job 38:4–7), and of humans: *'Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness"'* (Genesis 1:26).

Angels feature throughout the Bible. Sometimes they're obviously supernatural (for example Luke 1:11); sometimes they behave like ordinary men (for example Judges 6). The word 'angel' means 'messenger'. They're God's messengers, doing His will: *'He makes his messengers winds, his ministers a flaming fire'* (Psalm 104:4).

Their power is awesome. One angel destroyed an entire Assyrian army (2 Kings 19:35). Essentially, they have the

limitless power of God at their command and can use it to do whatever is required.

At Work in World Events

There's a fascinating incident in the book of Daniel. An angel tells Daniel, *'From the first day that you set your heart to understand and humbled yourself before your God, your words have been heard, and I have come because of your words. The prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days, but Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me'* (Daniel 10:12–13). It conjures pictures of the Persian prince as some superhero engaged in a cosmic battle with the angel who eventually had to call for help. But the prince of Persia was just a man. When you read the chapter you see what happened.

Daniel had been mourning (and evidently praying) for three weeks (v. 2). That's 21 days. Perhaps this was because he'd heard that work had stalled on rebuilding the temple back in Jerusalem (Ezra 4:1–5). There was no apparent answer to his prayer, but actually the angel had been despatched immediately to help. The



prince of Persia was 'withstanding' the angel, because the angel was not using force—he was working 'behind the scenes', unbeknown to the prince.

'The Most High God rules the kingdom of mankind' (Daniel 5:21). 'The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will' (Proverbs 21:1). We don't know all the methods God uses, as He guides world events towards the ultimate goal of the establishment of His Kingdom (see for example Daniel 11), but it is evident that the angels are playing a crucial role—patiently working behind the scenes, unbeknown to the world's politicians and generals.

At Work in Individual Lives

Angels are not just concerned with world events—they're concerned with you and me. King David wrote Psalm 34 when he'd been saved from the Philistine king: *'The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them' (Psalm 34:7).* Jesus Christ said of his followers: *'See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven' (Matthew 18:10).*

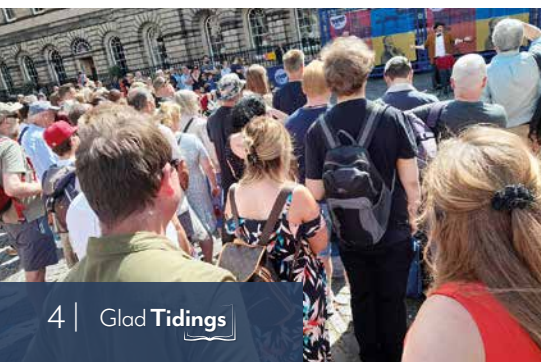
And one of the most breathtaking verses in the entire Bible: *'We know that for those who love God all things work together for*

good, for those who are called according to his purpose' (Romans 8:28). For those who have committed their lives to Christ, life can be very difficult—he never suggested that it wouldn't be. But they have the assurance that there's nothing in their lives which is out of God's control. God is watching over them, looking after them, guiding them and educating them, even in life's dark times. The angels are instrumental in this care. This is their job: *'Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?' (Hebrews 1:14).*

Jesus' teaching focused on the coming Kingdom of God, and how we can be there. In the Kingdom, his followers will be given eternal life (Matthew 19:29). He was once asked about the practicalities of eternal life. He replied, *'Those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and to the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage, for they cannot die anymore, because they are equal to angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection' (Luke 20:35–36).*

Those people who will be given immortality in God's Kingdom are described as *'a kingdom and priests to our God' (Revelation 5:10).* They will be like angels, and they will work alongside the angels in the tremendous work of restoring the earth.

There are things in this world that we can't see and we don't know about. This side of the Kingdom, we're likely to never knowingly see an angel. But what comfort and encouragement there is in the knowledge that they are there.



All Things Work for Good

MEDICS KNOW THE VALUE of comforting patients in a crisis. They won't say "You may not recover from this heart attack", instead they'll tell them everything's going to be all right. They don't know that everything will be all right, but it's what the patient needs to hear.



By contrast, the Apostle Paul speaks of life and all its crises with absolute authority and confidence:

We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28).

Those Who Are Called

Paul was a man called by God, and well aware of the blessings brought about through the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. These blessings are not for everyone: they are for those who 'love God'. What does that mean? It means to be obedient to Him and to obey His commandments. As the wise man says, 'In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths' (Proverbs 3:6).

Throughout his life as a follower of Christ, Paul was no stranger to suffering. He endured persecutions, hardships and hunger. He accepted them because he loved God and through his conversion he had been called to God's purpose, which is that all the earth will be filled with God's glory (Habakkuk 2:14). Paul knew that however hard his life was, God was guiding him towards that ultimate reward.

Jesus does not tell us that our lives as his disciples will be easy, in fact it can be the opposite: '*I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world*' (John 16:33).

Paul said as much to the congregations of believers to whom he spoke: '*strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God*' (Acts 14:22).

So when Paul says that '*all things work together for good*', he does not mean present wealth or comfort or good health—he means our ultimate good: '*For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us*' (Romans 8:18).

This is the context of the verse we're considering: '*And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew*

he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified' (Romans 8:28–30). Those who belong to Christ were foreknown by God. He has had them in mind from the beginning. They are the ones He will justify, and ultimately glorify. Not only that: predestined, called, justified and glorified.

The Glory to be Revealed

These are words of King David at the end of his life: *'Does not my house stand so with God? For he has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and secure. For will he not cause to prosper all my help and my desire?'* (2 Samuel 23:5). David was not perfect—he committed a horrible sin (which is recorded in 2 Samuel 11). But he knew that God had forgiven him, and made with him an everlasting covenant. Despite his failings, all things worked together for good for David.

The prophet Habakkuk lamented the disaster which was to come on his nation through the impending Babylonian invasion. But he had words of encouragement for his people. Whatever happened, they should trust in God:

Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will take joy in the God of my salvation (Habakkuk 3:17–18).

In Hebrews we see the greatest example of the principle that all things work together for good—the Lord Jesus Christ:

Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12:1–2).



The writer is exhorting his readers to prepare themselves as though for a race, to follow Christ. He lists only a few of the dreadful things which the Lord endured, before he was put to death. During his life he endured shame and agony: and he did it by faith in the promise of God, by which he saw the joy that was set before him. The prospect of the Kingdom of God, in which he will reign in glory over a world at peace on his ancestor David's throne (Luke 1:32), sustained and encouraged him.

We may not be asked to give up our lives, but we do have the example of the Lord Jesus to follow; and if we do this faithfully, when he returns to establish his Father's Kingdom he will invite us to share in his glory (Matthew 25:21). We will then fully understand how all things have worked together for good in our lives.

Roy Soffe

Holy Spirit Gifts

part 1

IN EVERY GENERATION there seems to be a revival of the claim to possession of the Spirit gifts, particularly the gifts of tongues and of healing. There are today religious bodies who assert that these gifts are manifested in their services. Are these claims true? The Bible supplies the authoritative answer.

The Spirit of God is the radiant energy by which God is in touch with all creation: by which He performs His will. The following verses illustrate this. *'When you send forth your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground'* (Psalm 104:30); *'Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence?'* (Psalm 139:7); *'In him we live and move and have our being'* (Acts 17:28).

An instructive statement by King David shows that he was inspired by the Spirit of God: *'The Spirit of the LORD speaks by me; his word is on my tongue'* (2 Samuel 23:2).



The Apostle Peter affirms that the Bible's prophets did not speak their own words, but God's: *'No prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God*

as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit' (2 Peter 1:21).

Promised by Jesus

Jesus Christ promised his disciples that after his departure the *helper*, the Holy Spirit, would be sent to them: *'When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come'* (John 16:13). This was referring to the inspiration by which they would speak and write God's Word. We have the evidence of the spirit of truth in the form of the Bible's New Testament.

Jesus also promised his disciples the ability to produce signs: *'These signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up serpents with their hands; and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover'* (Mark 16:17–18). With Mark's account of the promise of Jesus we must compare the parallel record by Matthew. Jesus also said, *'Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age'* (Matthew 28:20). *'The end of the age'* means *'all the days'*. It appears that Christ was telling his disciples that he would be with them till the end of that age—presumably the Jewish age, which lasted till the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD.

By this time the written Bible was almost complete. From the words of Matthew we can conclude that a time limitation is set to the gifts recorded in Mark.

The Acts of the Apostles

The book of Acts is the account of the community of believers in the years following Christ's ascension to heaven. It commences with the coming of the Holy Spirit.

When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance (Acts 2:1–4).



This phenomenon provoked amazement among the people around. Peter took the opportunity to preach the Gospel to them. When they were persuaded by his words and asked what they should do, he urged them, *'Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the*

promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself' (vs. 38–39). You and your children—that is, I suggest, two generations; and not limited to those present, but to all scattered abroad who received the truth.

On one occasion Philip went to Samaria. Here he performed miracles of healing which attested the truth of his message when he *'proclaimed to them the Christ'* (Acts 8:5). Those who believed were baptized (v.12).

This account of the Samaritans receiving the Gospel is instructive in two ways. Firstly, the new converts had no gift of the Spirit: *'for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus'* (v. 16). So the gift of the Spirit is clearly not essential to entering the way of salvation, or automatic at baptism. Secondly, it was necessary for Peter and John to come from Jerusalem to confer the gifts of the Holy Spirit to the Samaritans—so it was evidently not in Philip's power to do so.

Cornelius and his friends are the exception (about whom we read in chapter 10), in that the Spirit was given to them and they spoke with tongues before they were baptized (vs. 44–48). But this was to convince Peter and the Jews with him that God was indeed accepting the Gentiles, and that Cornelius must be received by them.

The Letters

Further information on the subject can be gathered from the letters of the New

Testament. Communities of believers were founded throughout the Roman Empire within 30 years of the death of Christ. At first, of course, the written New Testament did not exist. They 'reasoned' concerning the purpose of God from the Old Testament (for example Acts 17:2). The letters to Romans and Hebrews show how the apostles used the Old Testament to demonstrate teaching about Christ.

But this knowledge derived from the Old Testament was opened up by means of the gifts of the Spirit, and it was supplemented by revelation through the same gifts. Peter noted that the Old Testament prophets did not understand their message fully. *'It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look'* (1 Peter 1:12).



Under the guidance of God the New Testament was written, and as each part was produced it received the endorsement of those who had the gift of prophecy (1 Corinthians 14:37), and was placed with the Old Testament and classed as 'Scripture' (2 Peter 3:16).

What Were the Gifts?

The fullest information concerning the gifts is to be found in 1 Corinthians chapters 12–14. The Apostle Paul provides a list of the gifts:

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills (1 Corinthians 12:4–11).

The relative importance of the gifts is given in verse 28: *'God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues.'* (Note that the gift of tongues, which is often most prominent today in churches which claim to possess the gifts, is the least important!) Reflection shows why the first three are in the position they occupy. They are all concerned with instruction—with imparting knowledge of the purpose of God. By this comes faith, without which no one is pleasing to God (Hebrews 11:6). The other gifts were subsidiary to this object, and served as a

demonstration that the message was of God (1 Corinthians 2:3–5).

The presence of this variety of gifts led to rivalry in Corinth. It seems that there was desire for the showier gifts, and for the display of them. Meetings degenerated into scenes of disorder as they tried to override one another in the exhibition of their gifts. Paul corrected them:

What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up. If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn, and let someone interpret. But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent in church and speak to himself and to God. Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged, and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets. For God is not a God of confusion but of peace (ch. 14:26–33).

It should be noted that the gifts were under the control of those who possessed them, and Paul said they must be disciplined in their use of them. The governing principle in the exercise of the gifts was to be the edification of the church. For this reason the gift of prophecy was the more valuable.

Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy. For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit. On the other hand, the one who prophesies

speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation (ch. 14:1–3).

Prophesying, or ‘telling forth’ the mind of God, led to an intelligent grasp of God’s ways, and directed those who heard in the way of mental and moral harmony with God. Prophecy was essential for belief in the days when the New Testament did not exist. The reading of the Word of God is the modern equivalent of it. By it the mind receives instruction in God’s thoughts, and the character takes on a likeness to the character of Christ.



It follows that if the gifts of the spirit were available today, prophecy would be first and foremost—telling forth the things of God, in harmony with Bible teaching.

Continued on page 15

Questions? Comments?
We'd love to hear from you!

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Foolish Questions

"HAVE YOU GIVEN HIM his evening medicine?" the manager asked. Alison looked uncertain and hesitated.

"Well, have you, or haven't you? It's a simple question!"



In fact the question was not that easy to answer. Alison had administered an injection at tea-time; the resident had said that he did not want any painkillers, and it was not time for his bed-time tablets. So it wasn't a simple question.

Unwise Questions

This was an unfortunate situation, and probably a mistake. But sometimes questions are designed to trick people. For example, the Jews asked Jesus, *'Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? Should we pay them, or should we not?'* (Mark 12:14).

Jesus showed them Caesar's image on a Roman penny (a denarius) and replied, *'Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's'* (v. 17).

They '*marvelled at him*', and no wonder. This very clever reply shows the foolishness of the question, while also summing up the life of a disciple. A Christian's conscience is frequently challenged in the effort to obey God but wherever possible also to please other people, especially those in authority (Romans 12:18, 13:1).

Questions about religion are not always as simple or sensible as they might seem. For example, it's often said that "God's love is unconditional". Is this true? Here are some facts:

All blessings come from God and He sends these on the good and on the wicked (Matthew 5:45, James 1:17)

God looks after those who trust Him and who try to obey Him (Psalm 37:1–11, John 12:26, Hebrews 13:5–6, 1 Timothy 6:17)

God hears some prayers but refuses to answer others (Proverbs 28:9, Isaiah 1:15, Jeremiah 11:14, Micah 3:4, James 4:3)

Not everyone will be saved (Mark 16:16, John 3:18, 2 Thessalonians 1:7–10).

Questions About God's Love

The statement that God's love is unconditional is very appealing, but the answer is not straightforward. It certainly does not mean what some would like it to

mean—that we can do whatever we like, and God will still give us our reward.

The phrase ‘unconditional love of God’ does not occur in the Bible. When we use non-biblical language we are in danger of stating unbiblical ideas, and so believing false statements. It could be as bad as adding to or taking away from the words of the Bible, which is an extremely serious mistake (Revelation 22:18). Many believers try to summarise their faith in creeds. Tragically, these tend to introduce non-biblical language and so are prone to stating error and even contradicting the Bible.

There is a verse which is often used to justify the idea of God’s unconditional love:

God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).

So God does love everyone, and the offer of salvation is open to everyone—but only those who believe will benefit from His love.

The Bible says that ‘*God is love*’ (1 John 4:8), but we need to understand what this means. God is the almighty Creator of the universe—much greater than us. Is it reasonable for us to tell Him how He should be or how He should behave? To define what we mean by ‘love’ and then expect Him to fit our definition? It is not even logical: different people will have conflicting definitions and God could not satisfy them all. He defines Himself and

defines love—otherwise we are inventing our own god.

Bible Based Belief

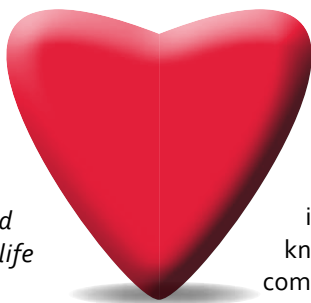
So what is meant by the statement ‘*God is love*’ (1 John 4:8)? John goes on to explain. We should always refer to the inspired Word of God which is absolutely true, in preference to our own opinions which might be wrong.

In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins (1 John 4:9-10).

So the supreme love of God toward us is in giving us hope of salvation through the death of His Son. However, in order to be saved we need to know and believe this, and then come to Him on His terms. The only way to find out what God wants of us is to read the Bible.

Therefore we should believe the Bible and try, wherever possible, to use biblical language and ideas when discussing its teaching. We should not get flummoxed by, or waste our time on, questions which are ill-conceived. The care manager’s question was ambiguous and unfair. Similarly our questions about the Bible can be silly and can even amount to ‘*ignorant controversies*’ (2 Timothy 2:23). The more familiar we are with the Bible and its teaching, the more accurately we will express our faith.

Anna Hart



Come, See and Believe

THE BIBLE'S NEW TESTAMENT begins with the four gospels, which tell us of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Each of the four writers was intent on bearing witness to his own knowledge of Jesus, and he wrote what he did under God's inspiration so that we, the readers, should share that knowledge. Two of the writers, Matthew and John, had been close to Jesus from the time of his baptism through to his death and resurrection. This was their qualification to become apostles and to be tasked with taking the Gospel message to the ends of the earth. Each was able to write of the life of Jesus, his ministry and teaching, and the miracles, wonders and signs he performed.

But the writers wanted to do more than that—they wanted us to know who Jesus is, his nature and character, his compassion for people. Their aim was not just that we should know about him, but for us to feel that we begin to know him as a person, and so we might have a relationship with him.

Each gospel writer announces the status of Jesus early on. For Matthew he is Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham (Matthew 1:1). For Mark he is the Son of God (Mark 1:1). In Luke's gospel, through the words of the angel Gabriel to Mary, Jesus will be great and the Son of the Most High (Luke 1:32). For John he is the Word made flesh (John 1:14)—that is, conceived in the mind of God in the beginning and by his birth becoming flesh, a man

dwelling among us, full of grace and truth, manifesting God's glory as the only Son of the Father.

We may be familiar with the term Jesus Christ. "Christ" is not a name so much as a title. It is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew "Messiah", which means "anointed"—the Saviour, who was promised by the prophets and long awaited by the Jews (for example Isaiah 9:6).

Come and See

In the gospels people were invited to see Jesus. In Matthew's record wise men saw a star in the east. They called it his star, and came to worship him (Matthew 2:2).



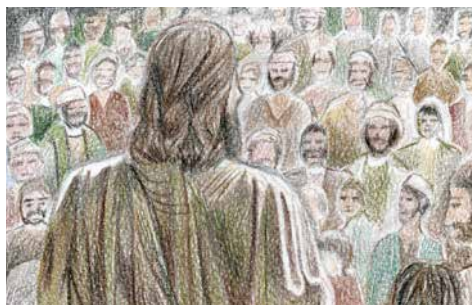
Later the Lord invited the people of his day to come to him: '*Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*' (Matthew 11:28). Through Matthew's writing the invitation is extended to us too.

Mark invites us to see the Master as a man of action, who acted swiftly in compassion for his fellows (for example the word

'immediately' occurs 35 times in Mark's gospel).

Luke records how shepherds in the fields keeping watch over their flock by night were invited by an angel to be the first to see the new-born baby lying in a manger, who would be the Saviour, Christ the Lord (Luke 2:8–11).

In his first chapter John invites us to see Jesus: in the words of John the Baptist, '*Behold, the Lamb of God*' (John 1:36). When the Bible uses the word 'behold' it usually announces something extraordinary, something to be taken special notice of. God was at last fulfilling the prophecy of Abraham, that God would provide Himself a lamb (Genesis 22:8). The two disciples who heard John say this were afterwards invited by Jesus to come and see where he was staying, and to be with him.



In John's sixth chapter three words are used separately, but they describe a sequence: 'come', 'see', 'believe'. These three words express the whole purpose of the Gospel. Those who come to Jesus will not hunger, and those who believe in him will not thirst, because the bread and water of life will always be available to them (v. 35). And, '*This is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him*

should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day' (v. 40).

See and Believe

We might be inclined to ask whether the gospels record the whole of the life and ministry of Jesus, and the answer is no. Although different gospels often record the same event, so we get different angles on that one event, the gospel records actually omit more than they contain. It has been calculated that the events recorded in the gospels account for about 70 days, whereas there will have been more than a thousand days in Jesus' three and a half-year ministry. So we are just given a window into his life and work, being told the things that are most important for us to know. The Apostle John is clear about this: he records a small number of miracles, and tells us their purpose:

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name (John 20:30-31).

John Boulton

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Holy Spirit Gifts

part 2

IN CHAPTERS 12–14 of 1 Corinthians, Paul was concerned to correct abuses of the spirit gifts. He began by giving the test by which the true was to be known from the false. The desire to excel led to the imitation of gifts, and therefore there was need for discrimination.



The existence of the false should not cause surprise. The true quickly leads to imitation. There were false prophets in Israel who led the people astray and were severely denounced (Jeremiah 29:8–9). The rise of false teachers in New Testament times was expected: *'False prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you'* (2 Peter 2:1). *'[Do not] be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come'* (2 Thessalonians 2:2).

It seems as though the Thessalonians were so wary of false prophets that they were suppressing the spirit gifts. Paul told them not to do this: *'Do not quench the Spirit. Do*

not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good' (1 Thessalonians 5:19–21).

The need for testing the teachers continued as long as the gifts lasted. Several years later John found it necessary to write, *'Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world'* (1 John 4:1). In his letter to the Ephesians Jesus Christ commended them for exposing false apostles: *'I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false'* (Revelation 2:2).

So it should be no surprise that there are spurious claims to spirit gifts. They must be tested by the Word of God.

The Test of Teaching

There is one test which is unfailing—it was put forward by Paul, and later by John.

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed. You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led. Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says "Jesus is accursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except in the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:1–3).

A prominent god in the First Century was “My Lord Serapis”. No teacher who was influenced by a pagan cult would assert that Jesus was lord. On the other hand, no teacher with the true gifts of the spirit would say “Jesus is accursed!” The test of the prophet was the truth of their teaching.



Paul was confronting the worship of ‘mute idols’. By the time John wrote, some years later, a new danger to faith had emerged, in the form of the infiltration of wrong teaching. *‘Many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist’* (2 John 1:7).

Jesus was acknowledged as Lord, but it was denied that he had ‘come in the flesh’—that is, that he was a mortal man (Hebrews 2:14). The test again imposed was whether the doctrine taught was right. The test is one that can and should be applied in all ages. Is the teaching of those who claim to have spirit gifts in harmony with the Word of God? When people, for example, curse Jesus in their speech, or deny that he was a mortal man, then it is evident that the spirit in them is not of God.

A More Excellent Way

Gifts varied in value and importance. Paul says, *‘Earnestly desire the higher gifts.’* Then he adds, *‘And I will show you a still more excellent way’* (1 Corinthians 12:31). There is

something better than the best gifts of the spirit, and that is the way of love he goes on to describe in chapter 13.

Love is essential to the follower of Christ. Its absence nullified any benefit the gifts conferred. *‘If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing’* (vs. 1–2).

It was possible to display spirit gifts and yet be lacking in love, and therefore astray from God. Love must be the motivation for all that is done. It was evidently an important lesson to press home to the Corinthians.

Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away (vs. 8–10).

Paul says that the spirit gifts will cease, and he gives reasons. That phrase ‘in part’ means literally “from parts”. The prophecies, tongues and knowledge were spirits possessed by certain individuals, for the purpose of upbuilding the congregation. When the full New Testament was available, they would no longer be necessary and would pass away.

Next, he uses two illustrations to show the relative states of those who had the gifts and of those who had the completed revelation of God. The first one is taken from the progression from immaturity to maturity; the second refers to the

contrast between the imperfect reflection in a burnished metal mirror, and the actual image:

When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known (vs. 11–12).

The Purpose of Spirit Gifts

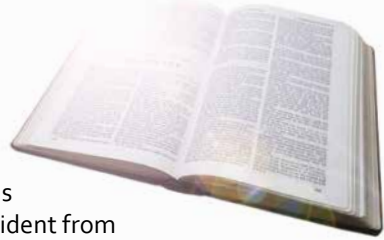
In his letter to the Ephesians Paul explains God's purpose in giving spirit gifts.

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4:11–13).

Certain men, qualified in particular ways, were 'given' by God for the purpose of equipping the brotherhood for its work. It is noticeable that all the qualifications here named are for instruction. The equipment of the saints for this work was completed when Jesus sent his angel to give to John the last message (Revelation 22:6). No additions have been made since then.

Paul said to Timothy, *'From childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may*

be complete, equipped for every good work' (2 Timothy 3:15–17).



It is evident from what we learn of one particular gift—the gift of healing—that the gifts were limited. Paul himself, who had the gift of healing (Acts 19:12), was unable to heal his friends Epaphroditus (Philippians 2:25–30), or Trophimus (2 Timothy 4:20), or Timothy (1 Timothy 5:23). God enabled the exercise of the gift when it suited His purpose. His purpose was to attest to His message of salvation:

It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will (Hebrews 2:3–4).

We have seen that the spirit gifts were a temporary arrangement which, like all God's arrangements, were perfectly designed to do the work for which they were intended. God is taking out of the nations a people. The means employed is the preaching of the Word. The spoken message of the First Century, with its appeal to and reasoning from the Old Testament, was the authoritative expression of God's will. The inspired writings of the New Testament exercise the same authority today.

John Carter

TT

Jesus destroyed the devil when he died. *'Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery' (Hebrews 2:14–15).* Who is the devil?

Ed

THE ANSWER IS AT THE beginning, in the Garden of Eden. The serpent led Adam and Eve to sin, and God condemned the serpent: *'I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel' (Genesis 3:15).*

The serpent was not a supernatural wicked being, it was a beast of the field that God made (v. 1). God used it to provide a test of obedience for Adam and Eve. They failed the test, and brought the curse of decay and mortality upon themselves and the world.

The serpent became a symbol of human disobedience. This symbol is developed throughout the Bible. For example in Numbers 21 the Israelites were plagued by serpents because of their disobedience.

In the New Testament we're introduced to the devil. It first appears in the account of Jesus' temptation at the beginning of his ministry (Matthew 4:1). Jesus' temptation contains strong echoes of Adam and Eve's

temptation. Theirs was in the garden, and as a result of their failure the world was cursed; his was in the wilderness, and as a result of his obedience then and throughout his life, paradise will be restored in the Kingdom of God. If you compare the three characteristics of the fruit which Eve took (Genesis 3:6), they correspond with the three temptations of Jesus (Matthew 4:1-11).

'Devil' is a word that means 'false accuser'. The devil is a pictorial way of describing our human nature, which prompts us to sin, as did the serpent in Eden. There was no serpent in the wilderness with Jesus—he was tempted in the same way we are, by the prompting of his human nature. He resisted it, then and throughout his life. He triumphed over it when he died, sinless.

That prophecy in Genesis 3:15 is a dramatic picture of Jesus' struggle with the devil. In the terms of the prophecy, Jesus was the offspring of Eve, and the devilishness of human nature was the offspring of the serpent. (See for example John 8:44.) It tried to kill him, but instead he crushed it.

So what is Hebrews 2:14–15 saying? Jesus had the same human nature as us, he was beset by the devil just as we are, but unlike us he never gave in. When he died he destroyed its power. When we are baptised, we symbolically share in Jesus' death (Romans 6:3). If we do this, we can share in his victory over the devil (v. 8).

Across

- 2 An angel stood in this (Numbers 22:24)
- 4 After it had seen the angel, Balaam did this to his donkey (Numbers 22:23)
- 6 The type of news the angels brought to the shepherds (Luke 2:10)
- 8 An angel appeared to him in a bush (Exodus 3:1-2)
- 12 Balaam hit his donkey with this (Numbers 22:27)
- 14 Paul said that he was beaten with these three times (2 Corinthians 11:25)
- 15 The angels live here (Matthew 24:36)
- 16 An angel spoke to her about the birth of Jesus (Luke 1:30)



Down

- 1 An angel told Paul not to be afraid of this (Acts 27:18-23)
- 3 Following a visit from an angel, the chains fell off those of Peter (Acts 12:7)
- 5 An angel caused these to be consumed by fire (Judges 6:21)
- 7 'And the LORD sent an angel, who cut ___ all the mighty warriors' (2 Chronicles 32:21)
- 9 Zechariah's description of himself on talking to the angel (Luke 1:18)
- 10 An angel rolled back this, which was in front of Jesus' tomb (Matthew 28:2)
- 11 An angel appeared to Joseph in this (Matthew 1:20)
- 13 On seeing the angel, Manoah and his wife fell on these to the ground (Judges 13:20)

(These clues use the English Standard Version of the Bible. If you're using another version some words may not be quite the same.)

Colin Jannaway

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