

Glad Tidings

Of The Kingdom Of God



Featured **Articles**

How to Become a Christian (p. 3)

Who Is Jesus Christ? (p. 9)

A Matter of Life and Death: Christianity vs. Humanism (p. 14)

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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How to Become a Christian

I PICKED UP A BOOKLET. It was a funky design and had lots of pictures. It took a couple of minutes to read—it told me about God, and how we are sinners, and how God sent His Son to save us from our sins. On the last page it invited me to be saved by saying this prayer:

Heavenly Father,

I'm sorry that I've messed up. Thank You for sending Jesus to die for me, paying off all my sins. Thank You for raising him from the dead. Father, please accept me as Your child and reveal Yourself to me. Forgive me for all my sins. I want to make Your Son, Jesus, the Lord of my life. Help me to follow His commands, and please give me eternal life to live with You forever. Thank You Father for the promise of a new life with You.

In the name of Jesus, I pray, amen.

Intrigued, I did a bit of research. There doesn't seem to be any hard data, but evidence suggests that when people are "saved" by responding to an invitation like this, there is an extremely high probability that very soon they will forget about it and their lives will go on as before.

When you think about it, this might mean one of three things:

1. God's method of saving people is not very effective; or
2. God really doesn't mind if, having been converted, people turn their back on Him; or

3. this is actually not the right way to become a Christian.

When you look into the Bible, it's clear that number 3 is the correct answer.

Jesus Christ told people what they must do to be saved. *'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel'* (Mark 1:15). They needed to understand and believe the Gospel (that means the "good news"), and respond by repentance—that means acknowledging that you've been going wrong, and turning around.

Being Born Again

This change of heart must be marked by action. Jesus said again, *'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God'* (John 3:5). To be 'born of the Spirit' means opening your heart to God's spirit and allowing it to transform your life, by means of His word the Bible (John 4:24, 6:63, Romans 8:1). To be born of water is baptism—a simple ceremony in which you are fully immersed in water. As Jesus commanded his disciples, *'Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned'* (Mark 16:15–16).

Baptism is a symbolic death and resurrection. It's how we show that we want to "put to death" our old way of life, and rise

to a new life in Christ. It's how we align ourselves with him, who literally died and rose to life again to defeat sin. It's explained by the Apostle Paul: *'Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life'* (Romans 6:3-4).

The Bible's New Testament contains the account of the birth and growth of the Christian community. It started with John the Baptist and then Christ and his disciples baptising people in the River Jordan. The consistent picture is that whenever someone committed their lives to Christ, they were baptised (with the notable exception of the robber on the cross (Matthew 27:38), who was physically unable to do so).

Clearly, there's very much more to becoming a Christian than reading a colourful booklet, or attending an emotionally charged evangelising event.

Falling Away

Those who publish these booklets and arrange these events are often motivated by the idea that when someone is "saved", God will see to it they can no longer be lost. The idea is based on Bible passages such as this: *'If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved'* (Romans 10:9).

The facts indicate otherwise. Jesus himself lost one of his disciples (John 17:12). Paul

was well aware of the risk that he might fall away (1 Corinthians 9:27). It's a fact of life that people can lose their faith. It's the more tragic, because of its seriousness. The Bible says that when someone turns away from their faith *'they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt'* (Hebrews 6:6).

The Bible describes the wonderful privilege of being a follower of Christ in many different ways. For example, Christ himself said, *'Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life'* (John 5:24). But nowhere does it say that we cannot forfeit this privilege if we're unfaithful.

To become a follower of Christ is momentous. It's the most important decision you will ever make. Your baptism is the day that your life turns around, you become a child of God and from that time forward you are preparing for eternal life in His Kingdom. Paul described his new life like this: *'I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me'* (Galatians 2:20).

It goes without saying that this is a decision which needs to be approached carefully, thoughtfully and prayerfully.



Walking With God

'DO TWO WALK TOGETHER, unless they have agreed to meet?' (Amos 3:3). The answer to this question is often yes—it's a fact of life. But we are looking at a different level of walking—walking with God, which we find in the Bible. This is not an ordinary walk down the street; we are speaking of a spiritual way of life, which is a life of seeking God in His word and keeping His commandments.

In Genesis 5 we read, *'Enoch walked with God after he fathered Methuselah 300 years and had other sons and daughters'* (v. 22). Imagine that, walking with God for 300 years! No wonder *'God took him'* (v. 24). He was a truly faithful, God-fearing man.

Then, there is Noah who, the Bible tells us, also walked with God (Genesis 6:9).

This walking with God is another way of saying, living a faithful, trusting, and a fully devoted life to God—in godliness and righteousness.

Before he died, king David commanded his son, Solomon: *'Be strong, and show yourself a man, and keep the charge of the LORD your God, walking in his ways and keeping his statutes, his commandments, his rules, and his testimonies, as it is written in the Law of*

Moses, that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn' (1 Kings 2:2–3).

'Love the LORD your God'

Moses commanded the Israelites, *'You shall therefore love the LORD your God and keep his charge, his statutes, his rules, and his commandments always'* (Deuteronomy 11:1). If they did this, great blessings would follow: *'For if you will be careful to do all this commandment that I command you to do, loving the LORD your God, walking in all his ways, and holding fast to him, then the LORD will drive out all these nations before you, and you will dispossess nations greater and mightier than you'* (v. 22–23).

You may notice that these blessings from God were dependent upon Israel doing as He required of them.

After David and Solomon, there were other kings over Israel and Judah. Some were good and some were bad. Asa was a good king, as was Jehoshaphat his son: *'He walked in the way of Asa his father and did not turn aside from it, doing what was right in the sight of the LORD'* (2 Chronicles 20:32). Ahaziah, by contrast, was a member of a godless dynasty: *'He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD*

and walked in the way of his father and in the way of his mother and in the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin (1 Kings 22:52).

It is the knowledge and application of God's Word that kept the good kings and the prophets, and the faithful people, walking on the path that leads to life: *'Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path' (Psalm 119:105).* By putting God's word in their hearts, the faithful can walk with God.

He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:8).

Israel's Example

God appealed through His prophet Jeremiah to the people of Israel to mend their evil ways: *'Thus says the LORD: "Stand by the roads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls. But they said, "We will not walk in it"' (Jeremiah 6:16).* They refused to listen to God. So He warned them: *'Behold, a people is coming from the north country, a great nation is stirring from the farthest parts of the earth. They lay hold on bow and javelin; they are cruel and have no mercy; the sound of them is like the roaring sea; they ride on horses, set in array as a man for battle, against you, O daughter of Zion!' (vs. 22–23).*

The nation of Israel was destroyed, first by the Babylonians and then by the Romans. But God promised that He would not make a full end of them (Jeremiah 30:11). They have returned from exile, as God promised. There will come a time (which is still in the

future) when they will mend their ways and walk with God: *'I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules (Ezekiel 36:25–27).*

The prophet Isaiah also said that there would come a time when the people of Israel will no longer go astray: *'And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, "This is the way, walk in it," when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left' (Isaiah 30:21).*

In the New Testament

The metaphor of walking spiritually is also found in the New Testament.

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life (Romans 6:3–4).

To walk with God is to turn away from our old life and walk in a new direction.

Uprightness and godliness come from following God's Word: *'Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their*





end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things' (Philippians 3:17–19).

Furthermore, Paul says *'we walk by faith, not by sight' (2 Corinthians 5:7)*. This is the path that leads to the Kingdom of God.

The Apostle John says: *'If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin' (1 John 1:7)*.

To walk with God is to walk in the light of His glory, trying to reflect that light as we live our lives uprightly and follow the way of righteousness. When we go wrong, *'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness' (v. 9)*.

There is always forgiveness if we return to the right path. But there are warnings for those who leave God's side and go their own way:

For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first' (2 Peter 2:20).

Final Thoughts

Now putting all this together: the walk of faith is a way of life. It is to follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ: *'Whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked' (1 John 2:6)*.

There are many more references in the Bible to the idea of walking with God and Christ. It's an instructive exercise to look them up with the help of a concordance or Bible app, and consider them.

Jesus told us to have our eyes set on our goal as we walk: *'Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness' (Matthew 6:33)*. He said it is not necessarily an easy path to walk: *'The gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few' (7:14)*.

The Lord Jesus Christ is the only name given among men by which we can be saved (Acts 4:12), there is no other. Let us thank God, who has called us to salvation, and given His Son to die for us (John 3:16).

The baptised believer knows that they are never alone in their walk. Jesus said he will always be with them (Matthew 28:20). He is their High Priest, and ready always to help when they ask:

Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:14-16).

Grahame A Cooper

Glad Tidings

"GLAD TIDINGS" is rather an old-fashioned title meaning "Good News." You might be forgiven for thinking there is very little good news today. The media bombard us with details of the unstable condition of the global economy, continual wars around the world, the overburdened state of health services, global warming and the resulting climate change. Added to these worries there is instability of the governments in many countries, the increase of mental health issues among the young, and so we could go on.

It is not surprising that many people "switch off" and try to find solace in various kinds of entertainment.

It is obvious to the thinking person that we cannot solve these problems. But don't despair—God has the answer and it is clearly expressed in the Bible, His message to humankind. This magazine tries to point you in the direction of this "Good News".

God's Goodness

From the very first pair of human beings, Adam and Eve, people have chosen to go

their own way and have suffered the consequences—mortality (Genesis 3:16-19). God could have washed His hands of humans when Adam and Eve first disobeyed, but He didn't. His answer was to send His Son, Jesus Christ, into the world to show us the way to live. He lived a selfless, exemplary life and finally sacrificed his life on the cross. God could not allow that to be the end, so He raised him from the dead to eternal life (Acts 2:24). As you will know if you have read "Glad Tidings" regularly, that can be the gift for us too if Christ finds us faithfully watching when he returns (Matthew 24:45-47).

In chapter 15 of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians he confirms this hope in detail. Here it is in a nutshell: *'For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive'* (v. 22).

This is the mainstay of the Christian hope. Read the chapter now and make up your mind to take advantage of the "Glad Tidings" - the "Good News" that it offers us!

Marion Buckler



Who Is Jesus Christ?

Son of God

Announcing that Jesus was to be born, the angel Gabriel told Jesus' mother Mary: *'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God (Luke 1:35).*

When Jesus was baptised at the beginning of his ministry, God Himself declared, *'You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased' (Mark 1:11).*

Jesus asked the Jews, *'Do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, "You are blaspheming," because I said, "I am the Son of God"?' (John 10:36).*

The disciples and even his enemies understood Jesus' claim, that God was his Father:

The disciples: *'Truly you are the Son of God' (Matthew 14:33).*

The Pharisees: *'He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, "I am the Son of God"' (Matthew 27:43).*

The Roman centurion: *'Truly, this was the Son of God!' (Matthew 27:54).*



Not "God the Son"

Some suggest that Jesus is 'co-equal' with God Himself. This is not what the Bible says. Jesus always acknowledged that the authority he had was not his inherently, but it came from his Father. *'I have much to say about you and much to judge, but he who sent me is true, and I declare to the world what I have heard from him' (John 8:26).*

During his agony in the garden of Gethsemane on the night before he died, Jesus made his own will subject to the will of his Father. *'Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done' (Luke 22:42).*

Because Jesus was the son of Mary, a human mother, he inherited human nature just like us. So he had to face temptation, like us. But unlike us he always overcame temptation; his life was sinless. He is *'one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin' (Hebrews 4:15).*

His Care For Us

Jesus fulfils three important roles concerning those who are his followers:

1. High Priest

Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens,

Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession (Hebrews 4:14).

Under the Law of Moses, the High Priest entered the temple representing the people to God. He returned representing God to the people. The High Priest was a sinful man. He was allowed to enter into the temple's Holy of Holies, into the very presence of God, only once a year on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16). By contrast, Jesus is the sinless High Priest who now sits at his Father's right hand, representing believers to God.

2. Mediator

There is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 2:5).

A mediator is a "go-between". The role of a mediator is to bring reconciliation between two separated parties. Jesus is "at one" with his Father because his life was completely faultless. Jesus is "at one" with us because, like us, he had human nature. So, Jesus is the perfect mediator between us and God. *'Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ' (Romans 5:1).*

3. Advocate

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous (1 John 2:1).

An advocate is someone who pleads another person's cause and presents their requests to someone in authority. Jesus now sits at his Father's right hand,

representing his people to his Father. *'Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth... him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood' (Revelation 1:5).*

At the Centre of God's Purpose

Jesus is the key to God's purpose with the world and us. *'He is before all things, and in him all things hold together' (Colossians 1:17).*



He is human like us, son of Mary, and also divine, being son of God. He suffered and was tempted, like us, but was sinless. He "built the bridge" between God and us. *'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me' (John 14:6).*

In the Image of God

Twice in the New Testament Jesus is presented as an "image" of God.

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation (Colossians 1:15).

He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high (Hebrews 1:3).

All of us are made in God's image (Genesis 1:27)—in our small way we can think like God, and respond to Him and worship Him.



But we are imperfect. The "image" that Jesus presents is so absolutely right that he was able to say, 'Whoever has seen me has seen the Father' (John 14:9).

The Word Became Flesh

Let us think about the opening words of the Gospel according to John.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:1, 14).

Of course God cannot be separated from His Word. If a child disobeyed their father, nobody would say "They didn't disobey their father, it was only their father's word they disobeyed". That would be silly, because their father's will was presented in his word: the word and the father are inseparable.

In the beginning, then, God had a plan to fill the world with people, who of their own free will would respond to Him and love Him (Numbers 14:21). To achieve that, God gave us free will whether to serve Him or to serve ourselves. In Genesis 3 we

see how our first parents, Adam and Eve, disobeyed Him. They sinned and brought upon themselves and the world the curse of mortality. So God provided a Saviour, a perfect man, our representative who would obey where they disobeyed, and be sinless where they sinned. He heals the breach between us and God.

In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself (2 Corinthians 5:19).

Now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ (Ephesians 2:13).

It is not possible to overstate the greatness of Jesus Christ. When he returns to establish God's Kingdom, raise and judge the dead, destroy the forces of wickedness and finally fill the world with God's glory, he will at last receive the reverence he deserves, so that 'at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father' (Philippians 2:10–11).

David Budden

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A Model of Patience

There is one other incident in the relatively uneventful life of Isaac that deserves attention. This one, too, shows how harmoniously the Bible's Old and New Testaments blend in their teaching. Isaac, as we saw in a previous article, was a shepherd and cattle rancher like his father Abraham. As his flocks and herds increased, he had to spread out over more and more of the countryside to feed them. This annoyed the Philistines, for he was a foreigner, and they resented his prosperity. When they asked him, not too politely, to move on, he took his family back to the Valley of Gerar (Genesis 26:14–17).



A first priority for sheep farming in Israel is to secure a water supply. In damper climates sheep can obtain enough moisture from the grass they eat not to need drinking water, but in Israel's climate the 'still waters' (Psalm 23:2) were essential for life. Isaac's servants therefore chose in the valley a likely site for a well, dug down, and were rewarded by finding running water,

the best type of water source. However, before they could exploit their find, the local Philistine shepherds appeared in force and insisted that, because they had always grazed the area, the water belonged to them. A fierce quarrel developed.

Isaac decided to stop the argument by instructing his men to dig another well. After the hard work of boring the first one, they were probably not too pleased, but they did as they were told. When the sweet, bubbling fluid again appeared, Isaac thought his troubles were over. But once again the native herdsmen appeared and staked their claim. It reads as though they were prompted more by envy or that natural mistrust we all have for strangers, than by a real need for water, for presumably they could have dug wells themselves with the same success.

Fighting for your Rights

You might expect Isaac to resort to force to establish his right to the well which his men had so laboriously dug. After all, his livelihood depended on the vital water. It is an expensive business, digging a well. Often it takes two or three false attempts digging down into the strata before a good fast supply is tapped, and wells in the plain of the Philistines can be very deep. There is one at Gaza, only a few miles from where Isaac lived, that goes down 160 feet (50 metres). Pride and a sense of grievance would have justified Isaac protecting his

precious investment in man-hours with the sword. Instead, he moved on and dug another well, all over again (Genesis 26:22).

At first sight, you might think Isaac was a spineless individual, unwilling to stick up for his rights. But shedding blood to preserve our interests is actually easier than swallowing our pride and moving on. The Law of Moses prescribed 'eye for eye, tooth for tooth' (Exodus 21:24) as punishment for certain crimes, and this is often misapplied to justify retaliation in kind when someone suffers hurt. Yet Jesus sets forward a better way, and that is the one Isaac took.

You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well (Matthew 5:38-40).

Insisting on our rights may give us some personal satisfaction, but it does not help the one who treats us badly to find God. 'Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,' Jesus concluded (v. 44). This approach views an enemy as a human soul in need of redemption, and seeks God's compassion so that they may be saved. This is a plain teaching of Jesus which is all too often ignored. How often do we read of someone pursuing their revenge through various courts of appeal, and spending a fortune on lawyers' fees, just to better their opponent or clear their name! Yet the Apostle Paul is emphatic that the disciple of Christ has no place seeking their revenge in a court of law. Rather, he suggests, we should suffer wrong, and allow ourselves to be defrauded.

Never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.' To the contrary, 'if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good (Romans 12:19-21).

Submit to God

God gives us all that we have. When we submit to evil in the right spirit, He is able to prosper us above what we lose, both in this life (as the book of Job illustrates well) and even more in the world to come. If by our returning good for evil our enemy's conscience is smitten and they repent, to deliver a person from eternal death is worth more than anything we give up in the process. Paul the Apostle eventually died as a prisoner, worn out, scarred and penniless because of the hatred of his enemies, but he still felt his life had been worthwhile. His attitude was that of Isaac, and Christ.

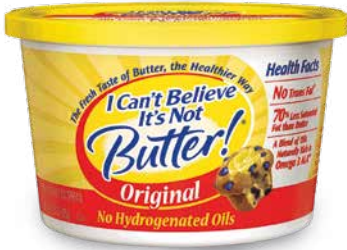
I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved (1 Corinthians 10:33).

David Pearce
(to be continued)

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

e-mail editor@gladtidingsmagazine.org
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A Matter of Life and Death: Christianity vs. Humanism



SOME THINGS WHICH SEEM very similar are actually quite different. There is a brand of margarine called “I can’t believe it’s not butter” which, as its name suggests, resembles butter in looks, taste and uses, but which is dairy-free. In other contexts, deceptive similarities can be dangerous, or even fatal. As a child I was warned strictly about the difference between tasty wild blueberries and the similar but highly poisonous deadly nightshade berries. “Not believing” in differences can be serious.

Humanism is probably the dominant philosophy in today’s world. Many people accept its principles without question. Some even assume that it’s the same as Christianity. What we’re going to see is that, despite apparent similarities, true Christianity is radically different from Humanism. There can be no compromise between the two.

Similarities

At face value, dedicated Humanists and devout followers of Jesus Christ exhibit

similar behaviours. These include being kind, selfless, compassionate, generous and forgiving. Humanists often put me to shame. True Christians most certainly should aspire to be like this (Galatians 5:22–23). But that is where the similarities end, for Humanism and Bible Christianity are as different as deadly nightshade and blueberries in both their belief systems and consequences.

The Huge Difference

Humanists do not believe in God. Their focus is on the value of human beings, trying to promote justice, equality and well-being; relying on reason, evidence and human experience to develop a moral framework; and believing that it is in our power to solve the world’s problems. They do not believe in an afterlife.

In this last point, the afterlife, they are—at least for themselves—in agreement with the Bible. The Bible teaches unequivocally that the only way for us to be saved from eternal death is to believe in Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12) and, by implication, in God and His message to us. This is exemplified in the account of the Roman centurion, Cornelius. He was *‘a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God’* (Acts 10:2). But God required even

more than this from him. Acts chapter 10 describes how Cornelius had to learn about Jesus and be baptised in order to be saved.



So, belief in God is a fundamental difference. But even belief in God is not sufficient. God asks for not simply an acknowledgement of “intelligent design” or “a loving God”, but belief in what He says about Himself and about us.

One God

Some people argue that since there is only one God, we all worship the same God, and one’s particular religion is simply a matter of personal preference. The Bible argues the exact opposite throughout. The One God, described as the ‘*Holy One of Israel*’ (Isaiah 43:3), must be approached in the way prescribed by Him. Compromise is not an option.

He is ‘*jealous*’ (Deuteronomy 32:21, 1 Kings 14:22, Psalm 78:58), because He has the inherent right to our undivided worship. We are told to have no other gods, but to worship Him alone, and woe betide anyone who infringes this. God is the only Saviour (Isaiah 43:11), and this salvation is effected through His son, Jesus Christ.

Jesus’ parables make it quite clear that those who are not true disciples of his, and who do not follow him in trying to obey the God of the Old and New Testaments, are destined to perish. Anything other than total allegiance to this God merits death (John 3:18). This is the explicit message of Jesus himself.

Divine Wisdom

Whether or not we like it, the Bible presents a God who might not match human expectations or even desires. He often does or says things that we might find difficult to comprehend and which, to us, may not seem “fair” or “just”. But this God sets the moral standards. His standards cannot be deduced by any form of human reasoning. I defy anyone to work out by any process of “reason, evidence and human experience” that a loving God who hated child sacrifice (Deuteronomy 12:31, 18:10; Jeremiah 32:35) determined that His only son, a sinless man, should suffer terribly and die a cruel death in order to save us (John 3:16–17; Acts 2:22–23).

This foundational belief of Christianity defies human logic and our natural instincts. The Apostle Paul said as much, that the teaching about the cross was ‘*folly*’ to non-believers (1 Corinthians 1:18, 23). If we could not deduce this pivotal teaching, how can we deduce God’s divine moral system? As Paul said:

...it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart ... Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?” (1 Corinthians 1:19–20).

Centuries earlier God Himself said:

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways (Isaiah 55:8).

Top Priority

So, we simply cannot work out a system of godly morality on our own. And the focus of our lives should be on pleasing God, not on pleasing other human beings.

Jesus stated this:

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment (Matthew 22:37–38).

The most important commandment is about God. We are, most certainly, commanded to love other human beings (even our enemies, Matthew 5:44), but love of God must come first. And our love of and for other people must not compromise God's standards or our loyalty to Him.

Even Christians doing virtuous things without the right sort of love counts for 'nothing' (1 Corinthians 13:1–3). This is because natural human love is not the same as divine love. We need to learn what divine love means.

Hard Messages

These are tough, stark messages. The Bible message is not always palatable; we might not like it, and we might not think it "fair". But how can we challenge the authority of Almighty God? (Romans 9:20).

Admittedly, it is a huge step to move from believing in "a God" to believing that the God of the Bible is the ultimate authority defining right and wrong and all moral standards. But the Bible says that is what He asks of us if we are to please Him. That

is why it is crucially important to determine what the Bible is.

The Bible humbles us in relation to this God. For example, the book of Job teaches that we cannot know the answers to



everything in nature, let alone the ways of God (Job 37–39, 40:1–2, 42:1–6). It is foolish to believe that we can judge whether the God who made and sustains us and the universe is "fair and just". We must not try to evaluate what He says or does by our moral standards. He sets the standards.

Different Behaviours

Consequently, the difference between Humanism and Bible Christianity is absolutely fundamental. And the different belief systems do result in totally different priorities and in different behaviours. The true follower of Christ will never want to upset God, even if this means upsetting other people whom they love. Jesus warned about this (Matthew 10:34–39).

The follower of Jesus has other priorities: '*Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness*' (Matthew 6:33).

Contrary to what many people think, and too many modern churches teach, the focus of Bible Christianity is not social well-

being. Nowhere do any of Jesus' inspired apostles mention social reform or justice. They didn't appeal against the inhumanity of Roman rule even when they were being persecuted. They didn't merge their message with current philosophy. They didn't agitate for human rights, or engage in politics, or any form of lobbying outside the Christian church. Their approach was never, ever "Humanistic". Their sole concern was the purpose of God in offering salvation through Jesus Christ: the hope of eternal life in God's coming Kingdom, through humble acceptance of the Word of God (Romans 2:7). And for this they were prepared to die.

The difference between Bible Christianity and Humanism could not be greater. It is like comparing blueberries with deadly nightshade.

The Bible standards are absolute and completely definitive. That is why there can be no compromise. The consequences are eternal life or eternal death. It is that serious, and—while we can—we need to resist human wisdom and standards (clever though they may be), and learn God's wisdom and standards.

Anna Hart

The Bible Companion

Oh how I love your law!

It is my meditation all the day.

Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies,

for it is ever with me.

I have more understanding than all my teachers,

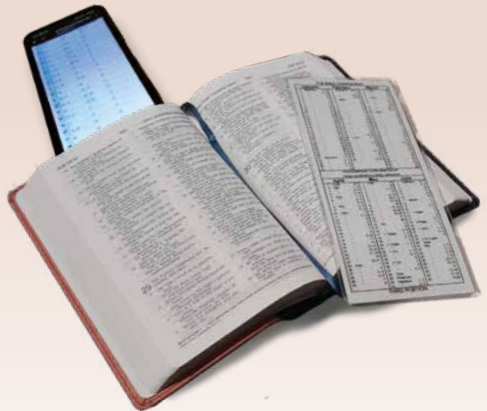
for your testimonies are my meditation.

(Psalm 119:97–99).

Why wouldn't you want to read the Bible every day?

Various Bible reading calendars exist which can help you to read the Bible regularly in a structured way.

One calendar, which is in widespread use among Christadelphians, is the Bible Companion. There are three portions of the Bible for each day of the year, and it enables the reader to read the entire Bible through in a year—the Old Testament once and the New Testament twice.



You can easily find the Bible Companion online by typing **Christadelphian Bible Companion** into your search engine.

IE *On page 18 of Issue 1663 you say, 'The consensus among scholars is that Christ was born around the time of the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles in the late summer.' What is the evidence?*

Ed When Jesus was born there were sheep and shepherds out in the field at night (Luke 2:8). Also, he was born during a Roman census, which involved a large part of the population moving around the country (Luke 2:1–4). Both these factors indicate a time of mild weather between spring and autumn.

Jesus was conceived six months after his cousin John the Baptist (Luke 1:36). John was conceived after his father Zecharias finished his duty in the temple (vs. 5–25). Zecharias was a member of the 'course of Abijah' (Luke 1:5). There were 24 courses of priests, each of which had two duties of one week each throughout the year. The duty rota started at Passover (around the end of March). Abijah's was the eighth course (1 Chronicles 24:10), so their first week of duty would have been at the beginning of June. If John was conceived during June, Jesus would have been conceived around December, and born around September.

It's thought that Jesus' ministry lasted for three and a half years. There are two reasons for this assumption. First, John's Gospel mentions three Passovers during Jesus' ministry, the first being early in the ministry and the last being the one on which he died (John 2:13, 6:4, and

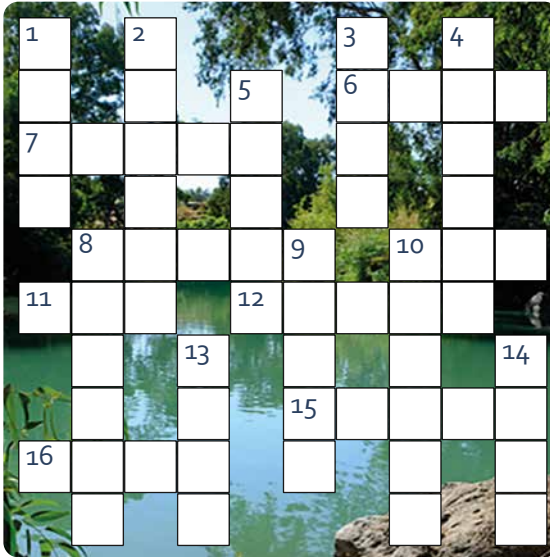
11:55–57). Second, Daniel 9:24–27 contains a prophecy of the coming of the Messiah (Christ). This prophecy was no doubt one reason why people were in expectation when Jesus was born (Luke 2:38), although it's more difficult for us to understand 2000 years later. Those who have studied it conclude that the Messiah's appearance lasted for 'half a week' (v. 27), which is three and a half days. In this and other prophecies, the term 'day' stands for a year. Jesus died at Passover (Luke 22:1–15) on 15th of the Jewish month Nisan (which falls around mid March to mid April). So if his ministry lasted for three and a half years and ended at Passover, this again indicates that he was born around September.

Around September is the time when the Jews celebrated the Feast of Booths (Leviticus 23:34). On this feast they camped out for a week in booths made of branches, commemorating their journey through the wilderness in the book of Exodus. If Jesus was born at the Feast of Booths it would be highly appropriate. John describes his birth: 'The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth' (John 1:14). The Greek word translated 'dwelt' literally means "camped". Jesus Christ showed to people God's Word in all its glory.

It's not possible, or necessary to know when Jesus Christ was born, but exploring Bible questions is always worthwhile.

Across

- 6 4 down asked Paul, 'Sirs, must I do to be saved?' (Acts 16:30)
- 7 The people here examined the Scriptures daily (Acts 17:10–11)
- 8 Those of sin produce death (Romans 6:23)
- 10 The Children of Israel crossed this sea, and Paul compared it to baptism (Exodus 13:18, 1 Corinthians 10:2)
- 11 Philip did this when he saw the Ethiopian eunuch in his chariot (Acts 8:30)
- 12 Jesus was baptized in this (Matthew 3:6, 16)
- 15 Paul encouraged his readers to be this with all perseverance (Ephesians 6:18)
- 16 The eunuch said, 'See, is water! What prevents me from bring baptized?' (Acts 8:36)



Down

- 1 Jesus called his Father this shortly before he was crucified (Mark 14:36)
- 2 The name of 12 across (Matthew 3:6)
- 3 Ananias said to Saul, 'Rise and be baptized and wash your sins' (Acts 22:16)
- 4 Paul baptized him and his family (Acts 16:29, 33)
- 5 Philip and the eunuch both went down into this for the eunuch to be baptized (Acts 8:38)
- 8 This is done to us symbolically when we are baptized (1 Corinthians 6:11)
- 9 He was with Paul when 4 down was baptized (Acts 16:29)
- 10 We should do this before we are baptized (Acts 2:38)
- 13 Due to the earthquake, the prison doors were this (Acts 16:27)
- 14 The eunuch commanded the chariot to do this (Acts 8:38)

(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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