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FEATURED ARTICLES

Private Faith vs. Organised Religion

In God's Image, Not the Machine's Shadow

Following Christ

WHAT IS GLAD TIDINGS?

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 mankind; 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.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ISSUE 1706

3

PRIVATE FAITH vs ORGANISED RELIGION

5

SAILING LESSONS

9

SCRIPTURE IN WORSHIP

13

DAVID AND GOLIATH: A TRUE STORY?

23

BIBLE READER’S WORDSEARCH

15

IN GOD’S IMAGE, NOT THE MACHINE’S SHADOW

17

FOLLOWING CHRIST

19

A SLAVE IN EGYPT

22

YOUR QUESTIONS

GLAD TIDINGS DISTRIBUTORS

United Kingdom: Becky Collard—orders-uk@gladtidingsmagazine.org

Australia: Ruth Morgan—gladtidingsaustralia@gmail.com

Canada: Vivian Thorp—vivianthorp@bell.net

New Zealand: Jenny Luxmoore—delux@xtra.co.nz

USA: Pat Hemingray—orders-usa@gladtidingsmagazine.org

Other countries: Andrew Johnson—orders-int@gladtidingsmagazine.org

EDITOR: Chris Parkin—editor@gladtidingsmagazine.org

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EDITORIAL

PRIVATE FAITH vs ORGANISED RELIGION



“I have my faith, but I don’t go to church—I don’t do organised religion.”

That’s a pretty common outlook these days, and it’s understandable. When many people think of organised Christianity they think of strange rituals performed by oddly dressed people in draughty old buildings and they’re not particularly interested. Maybe they think of the scandals that have beset some denominations. And in many societies people are becoming more introverted, preferring to access friendship and entertainment online from home rather than commit to a social group.

The fact is, however, that God deals with communities of believers, not with people who ‘go it alone’.

God’s Nation

In Genesis 12 we’re introduced to Abram, a faithful man who was given wonderful promises by God. Abraham (as he was renamed)

became a central figure in God’s dealing with humanity—the Apostle Paul tells his fellow Christians that Abraham is *‘the father of us all’* (Romans 4:16). At first there was only Abraham and his family, but the books of Genesis and Exodus chart the story of his descendants, the nation of Israel. God’s dealings with the human race focus almost entirely on Israel throughout the Old Testament. He told them, *‘I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the LORD your God’* (Exodus 6:7). They were to be the nucleus of God’s community, attracting people of all nations to come to Him (Deuteronomy 4:6).

God gave to Israel a land, and a law to live by, and a culture which revolved around the temple in Jerusalem. Their lives were regulated by a system of feasts and commemorations. Their religion was communal.

The Bible’s New Testament begins with the birth of Jesus Christ. Christ is the Son of God and the Saviour of the world (1 John 4:14); he is also the fulfilment of the key promises God made to Abraham. The coming of Jesus did not abolish God’s promises to Israel—it made them available to

everyone, whether actual Jews or not: *'If you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise'* (Galatians 3:29).

God's Family

The Christian community soon parted company from the Jewish temple and synagogues, but it's plain from the New Testament that the Christian faith is every bit as communal as was the Jewish faith. Its first blossoming was in Jerusalem shortly after Jesus' ascension to heaven. Three thousand people were baptised in one day. *'And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favour with all the people'* (Acts 2:44–47).

The Christian life centres around love—for God and His Son, and for fellow believers. *'Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God'* (1 John 4:7). The account of the First Century Christian community in Acts and the letters shows how this principle worked. Sharing fellowship with other believers provided support and encouragement in their individual lives, and taught them the essential qualities of godliness, such

as love, kindness, and patience with those who may not be so loveable.

Evidently there were those who wanted to 'go it alone', but this was roundly censured: *'Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near'* (Hebrews 10:24–25).

Christadelphians are a community who take fellowship very seriously. No one is perfect, but we try hard to live as our Lord commanded, looking out for each other's spiritual and practical welfare, studying God's word together, working together in the Lord's service, and making opportunities to enjoy each other's company. A feature of our fellowship is that when anyone is baptised and joins the worldwide family, they necessarily join an 'ecclesia' (a congregation), and that becomes their spiritual home.

Inevitably there are those who find themselves in physical isolation from their brothers and sisters, but their fellowship is encouraged via visits and, nowadays, the benefit of video conferencing.

Jesus Christ told his followers, *"By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another"* (John 13:35). This can only be done by those who embrace his family.



SAILING LESSONS

We have a friend—let's call him Jim—who recently went on a boating holiday with his wife Joan and her family.

You might almost call it a working holiday, because there was a lot to do just to keep the boat on an even keel and going where they chose, rather than where the wind wanted it to go! For them, the most important thing was the journey, not the destination. The family enjoyed their time together, getting to know each other better as they learned to direct the boat, and appreciated many beautiful sights along the way. And aspects of the holiday brought Bible lessons to mind.

Teamwork

Jim told me that one thing their holiday emphasised was the importance of working together. Teamwork is often necessary in life, but its importance was highlighted on this small boat. There were many tasks that needed doing, and things only went smoothly if everyone contributed. The family needed to learn how to run the boat and direct its course. They worked together to lay the anchor, signal, steer, watch wind signals, and so on. It would be a recipe for disaster if one person was laying the anchor while somebody else was trying to go full speed ahead! The crew member who was



steering needed to know where the skipper was wanting them to go, or they'd end up in the wrong place. Or imagine if everyone except Jim decided to have a sleep when many jobs needed doing! Cooperation was essential.

The spiritual parallel is clear: we need to work together in our spiritual journey. We are not isolated people working with God—teamwork is essential. The apostle Paul wrote about this: *'As in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them'* (Romans 12:4–6).

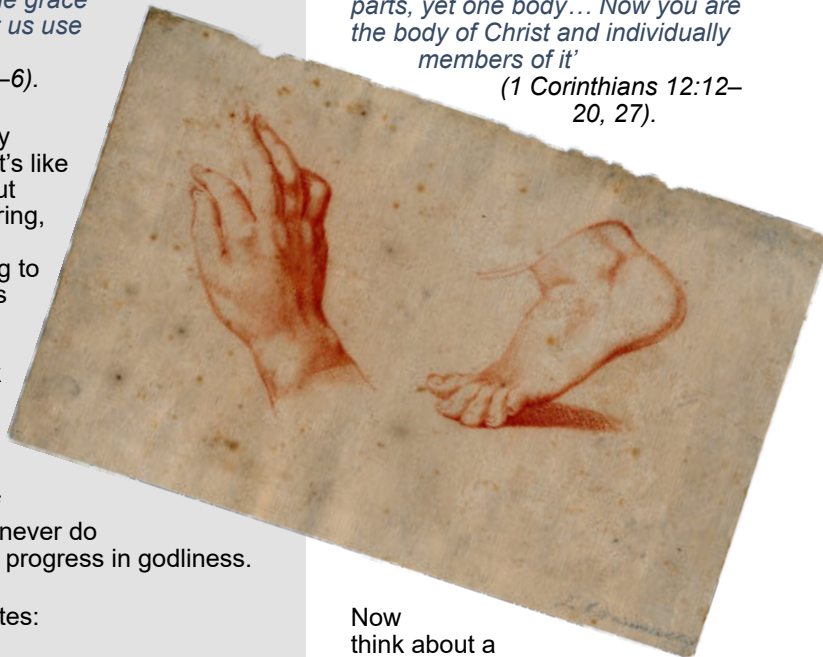
Imagine a body without eyes. It's like the boat without someone steering, or a group of believers failing to see who needs help. Just as a body without legs can't walk anywhere, a boat without a crew will sit in the harbour, and a group of believers who never do anything won't progress in godliness.

Again Paul writes:

'Just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or

free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body", that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body", that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body... Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it'

(1 Corinthians 12:12–20, 27).



Now think about a congregation of believers. Preaching the Gospel message is necessary, teaching the children is important, visiting the sick is vital. One person may be especially good at speaking to others

about their faith. Another might be better at putting preaching leaflets in letterboxes. A third person might be best at visiting the sick, while a fourth may have a great skill with young children and be perfectly suited to teaching Sunday School. Of course, we can't just find the one thing we are good at (or enjoy!) and ignore the other tasks. Jim's family had to take turns at the various jobs on the boat. Many tasks can be done by a variety of people—the main thing is to work hard in God's service, in cooperation with others. Imagine if the person who is best at visiting those in hospital should find themselves in hospital. Should they miss out on a visit? No, a body sometimes has to compensate, and teamwork is the ultimate answer.

Leadership

Now, teamwork is really good, but what if nobody is in charge? Suppose in the boat Jim wants to go left and Joan wants to go right, while Joan's mother wants to anchor for the night

but her father wants to go on for another hour. This is where the overall captain comes in. He has the overall job of guiding everyone, and all must defer to his instructions. Paul described disciples in Romans 12:5 as *'one body in Christ'*. Christ is the one we must obey. We must accept and follow his instructions. Jesus said, *"Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do... If you love me, you will keep my commandments... Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father"* (John 14:12, 15, 21).

So Christians must follow what Jesus did and obey his commands, just as Jesus obeyed his Father's commands. Picture him as the captain of our boat, the boat of our life journey. We can rely on him because he's taken this journey himself. He is the expert who knows the results of all our potential actions.



The Rudder

Something else our friend Jim contemplated while on the water was the tiny part of the boat called the rudder. It is only small, yet it plays a crucial role in guiding the boat. James says, *'Look at the ships also: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things' (James 3:4–5).*

James goes on to explain the terrible trouble we can cause with our tongues. Have you ever said something unkind on the spur of the moment and wished you could take

back those words? But the damage is done! James says of our tongue, *'With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so' (vs. 9–10).* If you ever feel like saying something foolish, rude or unkind, think of where you are going. If you want to travel to God's kingdom, then you need to use your tongue-rudder for good.

The wise man Solomon had a few things to say about the tongue, often as a contrast between good and bad uses of the tongue. To give two examples, Proverbs 12:18: *'There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing';* and Proverbs 15:4: *'A gentle tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit'* Which do you want to be? One who wounds or one who heals? One who gives life or one who breaks the spirit? Before opening your mouth, remember that the tongue is the little rudder of your body. Of course, just as a boat can adjust its course if it goes wrong, so you can ask forgiveness (of both God and the person you spoke to) and start off again in a better direction. However, this is not the ideal!

Jim and Joan's boating holiday made them ponder teamwork, following the captain's orders and using their tongues well. Followers of Christ must work together in harmony with fellow believers, with Christ as their captain as they travel together to God's Kingdom, using their tongues wisely to show their direction in life and encourage others.

RUTH MORGAN

WORSHIP—part 7

SCRIPTURE IN WORSHIP

'The sum of your word is truth, and every one of your righteous rules endures for ever.'
(Psalm 119:160)

After his baptism Jesus was driven by God's spirit into the wilderness in order to be tested (Matthew 4:1–2). He ate nothing for 40 days and nights, and it would be a time of agonising hunger.

In the gospel accounts, the temptations consisted of turning stones into bread, of taking all the kingdoms of the world, and proving he could be protected by angels if he jumped from a pinnacle of the temple. All were possibilities, but it must be clearly understood that these temptations did not take place in the physical world but in the heart and mind of Jesus. James tells us that *'each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire' (James 1:14).* Jesus was no exception. These three temptations were immensely powerful and assessed the strength of the Lord's baptism vow and his commitment to the things of God. After all, his Father had just declared publicly that Jesus was his *"beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased"* (Matthew 3:17).

Christ's temptations relate to basic human needs of survival and to pride. These are described elsewhere as *'the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life' (1 John 2:16).* They are not of the Father, but of the world, which will pass away.

How did Jesus deal with these temptations? He was a faithful Son, committed to his Father, and had



embarked on a journey that would end with his death on the cross. Jesus' responses to his temptations show us what the answer should be to all temptation, including our own. He did not make excuses or avoid the issues, but relied on scripture (the word of God) to control the matter and his own thoughts. This was a

confrontation between the will of the flesh, and the Word and will of God.

It was Adam and Eve's yielding to the will of the flesh in the beginning, that trapped all humanity in the morass of temptation and sin that we suffer from (Genesis 3). So, what did Jesus do? Because he knew in his heart what his Father wanted, he answered each temptation by his Father's revealed Word by quoting the Bible, and through this means was able to resist the temptations. It was the only way.

Desires of the Flesh

When tempted to turn stones into bread, he said *"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God"* (Matthew 4:4). This was to become one of the infallible principles which would guide his life and provide the moral basis of his relationship with people. He was referring to Deuteronomy 8:3, which was originally addressed to the people of Israel as they were about to enter the Promised Land after their 40 year journey from Egypt. Moses was reminding them how they had been provided for throughout their long wanderings, and

instructing them how to behave once they were in the Land, that they should not forget God but rather acknowledge Him in all their ways. This section of the Bible was written with Jesus in view—he was also the *'son called out of Egypt'* (compare Hosea 11:1 and Matthew 2:13–15).

Pride of Life

The second test involved a fall from the highest pinnacle of the temple. The accuser this time referred to scripture from Psalm 91:11–12, but it was not quite accurate. This Old Testament passage reads, *'He will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'* But the tempter in the gospel record says, *"If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you', and 'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone'"* (Matthew 4:6). It omits the important words *'in all your ways'*. This was crucial. The promise of God to protect Jesus was on the basis that he would be totally dedicated to observing and fulfilling his Father's will and ways. The temptation was that Jesus should abandon this, put himself first and then test God, presuming on the promised protection even when he was being disobedient. Again, Jesus turned to the law at Deuteronomy 6:16 to thrust the temptation away: *'You shall not*

not put the LORD your God to the test.'

Desires of the Eyes

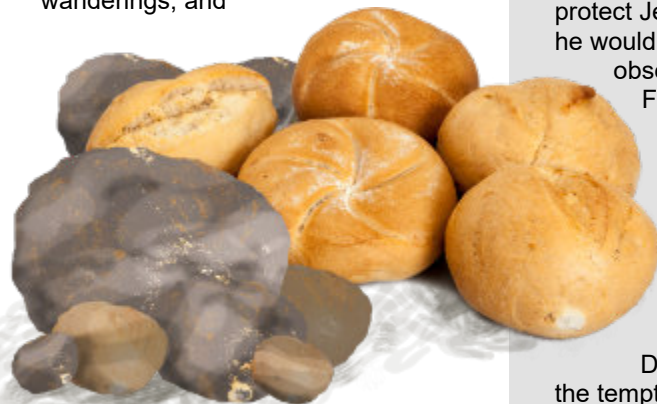
Then he was offered all the kingdoms of the world, if only he would worship the devil (that is, put himself forward). He replied, *"Be gone, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve'"* (Matthew 4:10). This refers to Deuteronomy 6:13. The context is an expansion of the first and second of the Ten Commandments, and the conduct expected by the nation when they were settled in the Promised Land. Jesus was aware that his fear and worship must be solely for his Father. He had been tempted to "worship" himself, as he was the king-designate of all he surveyed, but he knew that God alone must be worshipped. He conquered the trial.

We have looked at the temptations of Jesus and his answers from God's Word. His answers were an act of worship. His whole life was one of worship, lived out in the daily round and the common task. He was a unique Son, with a singular mission—to call out a people for God, that they should be reconciled and prepared for eternal salvation. Jesus yielded to this purpose, for God's Name must be honoured and magnified whatever the personal cost.

Jesus' life was a perfect act of worship. Our lives and obedience should also be acts of worship, even though they will be imperfect (Mark 12:33).

Worship is a living entity. It is shown in the way we respond to the commandments and the Word of God. It is more than just respect for what God has said. It embraces love and devotion to Him and His ways and purpose. Worship is the giving of self to the will of God as much as we can, to please our loving God.

VIC AUCOTT
(to be continued)



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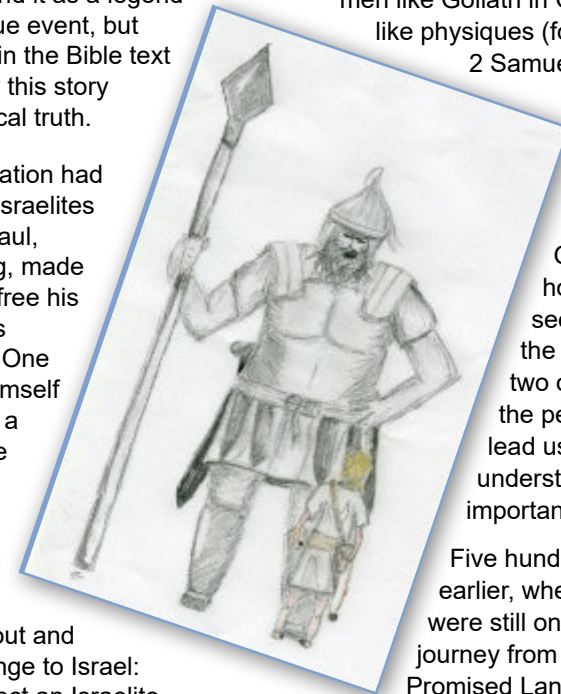
DAVID AND GOLIATH: A TRUE STORY?

Psalm 29

Ascribe to the LORD, O heavenly beings,
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.
Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;
worship the LORD in the splendour of holiness.
The voice of the LORD is over the waters;
the God of glory thunders,
the LORD, over many waters.
The voice of the LORD is powerful;
the voice of the LORD is full of majesty.
The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars;
the Lord breaks the cedars of Lebanon.
He makes Lebanon to skip like a calf,
and Sirion like a young wild ox.
The voice of the LORD flashes forth flames of fire.
The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness;
the LORD shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.
The voice of the LORD makes the deer give birth
and strips the forests bare,
and in his temple all cry, "Glory!"
The LORD sits enthroned over the flood;
the LORD sits enthroned as king for ever.
May the LORD give strength to his people!
May the LORD bless his people with peace!

You may know about David and Goliath: the story of an Israelite youth who accepted a Philistine giant's challenge and won. Some understand it as a legend rather than a true event, but there's a detail in the Bible text that shows how this story contains historical truth.

The Philistine nation had dominated the Israelites for years and Saul, Israel's first king, made it his priority to free his people from this warlike people. One day he found himself and his army in a valley facing the menacing Philistine host, when the Philistine champion Goliath strode out and issued a challenge to Israel: they should select an Israelite champion to face him in one-to-one combat, and the outcome would decide which nation would serve the other (1 Samuel 17:8–10). The young shepherd boy, David, agreed to the contest and slew the 3 metre (9'9") giant with a single slingshot. Then the Philistine army fled.



The fascinating detail is that the record incidentally mentions that Goliath came from Gath. Other passages confirm that there were men like Goliath in Gath, with giant-like physiques (for example 2 Samuel 21:20–22).

Giants from Gath

The casual remark about Gath as Goliath's home city may not seem significant. Yet the Bible provides two other mentions of the people of Gath that lead us to a better understanding of its importance.

Five hundred or so years earlier, when the Israelites were still on their wilderness journey from Egypt to the Promised Land, Moses sent spies to report on the state of the territory they were set to conquer. The spies returned with a report that the inhabitants were giants, of the '*descendants of Anak*'. The people were so huge that the spies felt like grasshoppers in comparison (Numbers 13:28, 33).

*Adapted from *Undesigned Scriptural Coincidences* by J J Blunt.

The man who finally led the Israelites into the Promised Land, Joshua, wiped out the Anakim (descendants of Anak), with just a few exceptions. It is those exceptions that are so intriguing:

'And Joshua came at that time and cut off the Anakim from the hill country, from Hebron, from Debir, from Anab, and from all the hill country of Judah, and from all the hill country of Israel. Joshua devoted them to destruction with their cities. There was none of the Anakim left in the land of the people of Israel. Only

in Gaza, in Gath, and in Ashdod did some remain' (Joshua 11:21-22).

So, the only Anakim who remained were found in three cities, one being Gath. This gives consistency to what we read about, several centuries later, when a huge warrior (Goliath) is there to trouble Israel, a man who comes from one of the cities Joshua hadn't conquered, Gath. It might not prove that David and Goliath were real characters who once fought each other, but small details like this contribute to its historical integrity.

JOAN LEWIS



The Valley of Elah, where the Israelite army was encamped when David fought Goliath (1 Samuel 17:2).

IN GOD'S IMAGE, NOT THE MACHINE'S SHADOW

Artificial Intelligence is developing quickly and is being used more and more across daily life. Society faces urgent, challenging questions about how technology is replacing work, and AI raises deeper moral concerns about purpose and what it means to be human.



Work and Welfare

Because work is tied to human dignity, the Bible consistently treats idleness as harmful, not liberating. Proverbs teaches, *'A slack hand causes poverty, but the hand of the diligent makes rich' (Proverbs 10:4)*, while the

Apostle Paul writes bluntly, *'If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat' (2 Thessalonians 3:10)*. Does that mean the Bible is indifferent to the plight of the poor?

The Bible offers a clear and challenging perspective: work is essential to human flourishing.

In the Bible, work is not just about earning income: it is central to God's design for humanity. Before sin entered the world, God gave humans work to do: *'The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it' (Genesis 2:15)*. This shows that work is not a curse but a gift. It allows human beings, made *'in the image of God' (Genesis 1:27)*, to reflect God's creative and sustaining activity in the world.

No—it repeatedly commands care for the vulnerable. *'Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute' (Psalm 82:3)*. Yet biblical welfare is not passive. In ancient Israel, laws such as gleaning allowed the poor to gather food for themselves (Leviticus 19:9–10). Provision was paired with participation, preserving dignity and purpose. This suggests that welfare systems are healthiest when they support those who are



able to get into work, rather than replacing work as a permanent condition.

Work and Purpose

The same principle applies to AI and automation. If technology displaces large numbers of people from work without providing meaningful alternatives, it risks undermining the very structure God designed for human life. The Preacher observes, *‘There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God’* (Ecclesiastes 2:24).

AI should serve humanity, not redefine humans as unnecessary. As Paul reminds believers, *‘Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord’* (Colossians 3:23). Work is a calling, not an obstacle to progress.

A biblical perspective challenges us to ask not only what technology can do, but what it should do. Work is good for people, and technology is just a tool. We mustn’t allow it to erode human dignity, or replace our God-given purpose.

JOANNE WALE

Questions? Comments?

We’d love to hear from you!

e-mail
editor@gladtidingsmagazine.org

website
gladtidingsmagazine.org

FOLLOWING CHRIST

The Lord Jesus wanted would-be disciples to be under no illusion as to what following him involves.

“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Mark 8:34).

Discipleship, by definition, must mean treading the same path as the Lord. It involves self-denial, the death of that urge which is in the heart of every one of us to give precedence to our own safety and well-being over everything else. Furthermore, the disciple must ‘take up a cross’ and follow their Lord.

Bearing Your Cross

Nowadays, people speak of ‘bearing a cross’ when they mean dealing with an arduous task which imposes itself upon them. But when Jesus spoke about bearing a cross, the expression was no metaphor for life’s little difficulties. A cross was an instrument of torture, devised by the Romans for executing criminals and rebels. It served as a grim warning to

other would-be rebels. And Jesus speaks of carrying a cross both as his own destiny and as the mark of a disciple.

He did not mean that people could qualify as his followers only if they were crucified in a literal sense, although that (or something similar) has indeed been the fate of countless thousands of his followers. The parallel passage in Luke’s gospel says, *“let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me”* (Luke 9:23). The emphasis in his words is upon carrying the cross, not being fastened to it, and this introduces another way of looking at the expression. His first disciples may have witnessed criminals being led to the place of execution, carrying their own cross and being made to walk through the streets as a public example. If such a malefactor had committed an offence that caused public revulsion, the crowds would line the streets to taunt him and shout abuse at him.

This gruesome image shows the depth of Jesus’ teaching. Disciples who really follow his teaching may find themselves at odds with the society where

A SLAVE IN EGYPT

they live. He calls upon them to live in a way that runs so counter to the values of the society around them that they are prepared to face abuse, taunts and derision from those who may despise them for their allegiance to him.

A criminal had no choice but to make the journey to the end. In contrast, a disciple is free to put down the cross, to opt out, to walk away. Jesus does not compel. He wants only disciples who choose to carry their cross to the completion of the journey, who “*endure to the end*” (Matthew 10:22).

Losing Your Life

And then he adds paradoxically: “*For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it*” (Mark 8:35). Two meanings are conveyed by the word ‘life’ here. There is this mortal life which is endowed with the instinct to hold on to it and to preserve it at all costs, even though it is very short. And there is eternal life which will be found on the other side of the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:50–55), and that will be a sharing in the life of God Himself. We gain the one only by renouncing the other.

The disciple who loses their life, either in martyrdom, or by devoting their life to the total service of their Lord, will indeed die, but beyond the end of this mortal life they will be raised to life that will last for ever.

Many people have bravely put themselves in danger of death, such as soldiers on the battlefield—people who willingly die for what they believe to be a cause more valuable than their own lives. But such self sacrifice will not benefit those who makes it if it is not, as Jesus says, “*for my sake*”. In these three critical words lies its extra significance. Those who lose their lives for any other cause but the one he calls us to—will never “find” it again.

“*For what does it profit a man,*” the Lord continues, “*to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul?*” (Mark 8:36–37). No amount of wealth or power or prestige can equal the value of one life.

Jesus saved his life by choosing the path that led initially to death. And having died at the hands of men, he was raised to eternal life by God and given “*all authority... in heaven and in earth*” (Matthew 28:18). That is the pattern that he lived, and it is the pattern that he calls upon his disciples to follow.

PAUL WASSON

Joseph was put up for sale in Egypt in the slave market, and found himself in the service of Potiphar, a high-ranking army officer. His position was humiliating. He had no friends to explain what had happened and set him free. There was no chance of escape—as a Hebrew he would stand out in a crowd. In any case, he could not speak the language.

With good grace he accepted his humble status, rolled up his sleeves, and set himself, with his father’s tenacity and business skill, to advance his new master’s affairs. God added his blessing. ‘*The LORD was with Joseph, and he became a successful man, and he was in the house of his Egyptian master*’ (Genesis 39:2). He worked his way up to become Potiphar’s manager. Eventually, ‘*he left all that he had in Joseph’s charge*’ (v. 6). No doubt Joseph was well treated by his appreciative master, and would enjoy a degree of comfort and prestige as



his responsibilities increased. But his heart must have ached for his distant family, and the cool mountains of his native land. He had no Bible to read to encourage him to believe and trust in God. The people of Egypt worshipped idols, and enjoyed a loose and self-indulgent life. There was nothing at all to keep him in the straight and narrow way. So when he faced his sternest test, Joseph deserves in full the credit for his victory.

Temptation

It came about like this. Joseph was a handsome fellow (v. 6). He probably inherited his good looks from Rachel, his mother. Potiphar was often away from home on official business. Potiphar’s wife, with what was probably a typical Egyptian morality, invited Joseph to go to bed with her. It would have been easy for the lonely man to accept her advances. ‘*But he refused and said to his*

master's wife, "Behold, because of me my master has no concern about anything in the house, and he has put everything that he has in my charge. He is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except yourself, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" (vs. 8–9). It reads like a sordid novel. But Joseph triumphed over the temptation, out of love and respect for God. When we remember he had worshipped God all alone from the day he had been taken from his father's house, this was a monumental faith. Not many of us would have been so strong.

Adultery is wrong. It wrecks families, and leaves children loveless and insecure. It breaks a most solemn vow. Adultery was forbidden in the code that Joseph was taught by his father Jacob. Jesus condemned

adultery in his commandments, nearly 2000 years later (Matthew 19:6). Society's standards may change, but God's standards have not changed over the centuries.

Only by constantly refreshing their minds with God's commands and asking for His help, can His children keep themselves 'unstained from the world' (James 1: 27). Joseph's test puts real meaning into the Lord's prayer, "lead us not into temptation" (Matthew 6:13).

Potiphar's wife was determined. Joseph's stubbornness only increased her desire for him. When at last she saw he would not yield, her resentment turned to hatred, and she vented all her spite on him. She told Potiphar that Joseph had tried to rape her (vs. 11–18). There was no one to speak up for Joseph. In a rage, Potiphar hurled him into prison.

Injustice

What a shattering reversal of fortunes, and how utterly unjust! Joseph's kidnapping by his brothers was nothing beside this malicious attack. After a career of faithful service, he had been condemned for a crime which he had resisted with saintly courage. Now he found himself immured in prison in a foreign land, with not a single person in the whole country to take his side. Could he still continue to believe in God after all that?

David wrote later of this episode in Joseph's life: 'His feet were hurt with fetters; his neck was put in a collar of iron; until what he had said came to pass, the word of the LORD tested him' (Psalm 105:18–19),

This was now the third test of Joseph's faith. The fact that he came

through it all is a shining example for us, in our ups and downs in life, not to lose heart. 'For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives. It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?... For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it' (Hebrews 12:6–7, 11), One day the dark clouds will pass away, as they did for Joseph, and the radiant light of God's Kingdom will enable His children to see His hand in their lives. 'He disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness' (v. 10).

DAVID PEARCE

(to be continued)



YOUR QUESTIONS

What are the steps to take in the search for a life partner?

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→ DMP

That is a big question! Briefly, marriage was created by God to provide companionship for the first man Adam, and to provide a stable background for bringing up children (see Genesis 2:18 and 1:28). Jesus says it was intended to be for life (Matthew 19:3–6).

In the Old Testament, God insisted His people must only marry people who shared their beliefs. They were not allowed to marry Canaanites, who worshipped idols (Deuteronomy 7:1–4). In the New Testament the Apostle Paul similarly advises Christians not to yoke themselves to unbelievers (2 Corinthians 6:14). So we should always seek a marriage partner who is a fellow believer in Christ.

During courtship, believers are expected to remain virgins until they are married (1 Corinthians 7:36). Sex outside marriage is forbidden (Galatians 5:19–21).

Ephesians 5:22–28 contains some rules for a married couple. They must treat each other as ‘one flesh’ i.e. as if they are the same person. This involves self-sacrifice, forgiveness, and true Christian love. They must be faithful to their partner. Divorce in order to re-marry is forbidden (Hebrews 13:4 and Matthew 19:9).

Parents are instructed to teach their children about God (Deuteronomy 6:6–7 and Ephesians 6:4), and children are to show respect for their parents (Colossians 3:20). There is a lot more that could be written on this subject!

WORDSEARCH

L	A	O	D	I	C	E	A	B
M	U	E	Z	A	P	R	C	D
M	U	F	V	H	I	L	D	C
D	X	M	E	T	K	N	E	S
P	O	S	A	N	R	Y	M	S
R	U	Y	D	G	Q	X	D	Q
S	H	N	V	I	R	E	I	W
T	O	B	W	I	P	E	Y	Z
S	A	R	D	I	S	M	P	O

EPHESUS

SMYRNA

PERGAMUM

THYATIRA

SARDIS

LAODICEA

(Answers:
Phildelphia
Smyrna and Philadelpia
Pergamum and Thyatira
Ephesus
Laodicea
Sardis)

Chapters 2 and 3 of the book of Revelation contain letters from Jesus Christ to seven Christian congregations (churches).

The names of six of these churches are in the Wordsearch, and are given in the panel alongside.

What is the name of the other church?

In these letters Jesus, who knew everything about the churches, appraised their ‘works’ and warned many believers to change their ways.

- Which two churches had only compliments?
- Which two churches were tolerating false teaching?
- Which church was doing good works but without true Christian love?
- Which church had no compliment and was unacceptably ‘lukewarm’?
- Which church was described as ‘dead’?

ANNA HART



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