

NT

A pattern for life in God's House

The Chosen Servant
Ineffectual prayer?



The full Gospel: predestined

Issue 1 2013

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From the Editors' desk

Some choice reading

I was talking on the streets recently to a member of a popular religious cult. As we discussed the identity of Jesus Christ, it became clear that he stumbled over the Bible's presentation of Christ as God's Servant. He could not conceive of a servant of God who was Himself God. However, this is not nearly so surprising when we appreciate that one of the choicest Bible revelations of God is that the sovereign God of all creation has a servant's character.¹ In the first of our anticipated looks at Isaiah's four portraits of Christ as God's Servant, we discover that He was so chosen because He was the only one worthy – chosen to lead as sons to glory all who believe in Him, who are also chosen ones, despite being so unworthy.



As we open up our panoramic sweep of the Gospel from eternity to eternity we begin on this same point of how each believer was chosen or predestined in Christ – which is the first of four staging points as we journey through Romans 8:30.

And it gets even better! For each true believer on Christ is not only chosen in Him, but is also stupendously blessed 'in Christ'.² The sphere of these blessings is reported as being 'in heavenly realms', and this introduces us to another topic for exploration this year, in God's will – one which should open up the letter of Ephesians to us in terms of our present corporate 'Body' status in Christ. We essentially dealt with Hebrews and the holies last year, so this year we aim to cover Ephesians and the heavenlies (its five mentions there will be rolled into four treatments). Old Testament saints, who obeyed the commandments of God, were blessed with all earthly blessings in earthly places,³ but our blessings are heavenly and spiritual.

Those whom God chooses, must also themselves make a choice, and we are pleased to introduce another series this year which aims to trace by analogy how the Gospel conquers the human heart. It's been said that an Englishman's home is his castle, but our take on the castle analogy is at once global and personal, as well as being highly visual – and, we trust, of practical help.

We do hope you choose to read all that's in store throughout these pages which are bursting with the truths of God's Word!

Brian

References: (1) Phil. 2:6-7 (2) Eph. 1:3 (3) Deut. 28



A reality check

‘All the world’s a stage’

Gilbert Grierson, Knocknacloy, N.Ireland

Going to a fitness program for the first time certainly gives you a reality check! Especially if the instructor puts you on a piece of apparatus that measures your heart function while you are exercising! For those of us who get out of breath climbing the stairs when going to bed, it can come as a bit of a shock to realise why this should be so. It certainly focuses the mind to realise the truth of the scripture that says, *our outer self is wasting away ...*¹ The Apostle also, when referring to this body that is sown into the ground at death, says that it is *sown in weakness*² and further on in the same chapter describes our bodies as *perishable*.³

And yet, sometimes, especially if we are young, we live as if we are going to be around down here forever.

The divine diagnosis that we are weak, wasting away and perishing, certainly focuses the mind. You begin to ask yourself the question, “Now what is there important to get done while I’m still around?” The things-to-do lists start getting re-evaluated!

“All the world’s a stage.” That’s what Shakespeare wrote, anyway; “and all the men and women merely players”.⁴ Well, I don’t think it’s quite like that. Things that happen down here have eternal significance for each individual. We’re not ‘merely players’ and it’s not all over once the curtain comes down. But I think I know what Shakespeare was getting at. I believe the wise preacher expressed it very clearly in Ecclesiastes:-

Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher,

Vanity of vanities! All is vanity.

What does a man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun?

*A generation goes, and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever.*⁵

Years ago, when at college, my friend Davy and I were co-opted (I can’t remember volunteering!) to stage manage a number of the college productions, both plays and musicals. I remember one set that we worked on together. There were a number of different scene changes that required some ingenuity in design so that the changes could be made swiftly and efficiently. We worked hard on that set; in fact we used more screws than nails! The end result was so well built that you could have actually lived in it. The trouble was, it was for a PLAY! The whole production was over in three days, and then everything was ripped down. You see, we had forgotten that what was required was only something temporary that would do the job but, at the same time, giving the audience the impression that it was a solid, permanent structure. With the effort we used we could have been better employed by



the local building contractors in town! A least what we had built would have been useful for longer than three days!

When we come up against the stark fact that life down here in this body is definitely not ‘everlasting’, we start asking ourselves the question, “Well, what am I doing to get ready for the world to come? What is it that I am building down here? Am I using screws instead of nails, as if I’m going to be living here forever, rather than accepting that what I’m living in, no matter how many times I go to the gym, is just temporary accommodation with a limited life-span?”

So, what is the conclusion to all this? It’s the same conclusion that the Preacher came to at the end of his book:

*The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgement, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.*⁶

Life is precious, and no doubt I will be working a little harder in the fitness suite, trying to keep going as long as possible, like the rest of us!

But I want also to keep my eyes on the sequel to this little time down here, knowing that when this scene changes, and the temporal props are taken away, the final eternal scene which God has built will last forever!

*So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.*⁷

References:

- (1) 2 Cor. 4:16 (2) 1 Cor. 15:43 (3) 1 Cor. 15:50,53-54
- (4) W. Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, Act 2, Scene 4
- (5) Eccles. 1:2-4 (6) Eccles. 12:13-14 (7) 2 Cor. 4:16-18

Bible quotations from the ESV

The full Gospel

Predestined

David Viles, Hayes, England

Chosen in Christ

At the time of writing, the world was waiting anxiously in the run-up to the US presidential election for the announcement of the final result. It would be momentous, not only for that country, but for the whole globe – the people would make their choice. The winner faces uncertainty about the outcome of his presidency and about the view that history will take of the success or failure of, arguably, the most powerful politician on the planet.

As Christians, by contrast, we may feel like those whom the apostle Paul surveyed in the Church in Corinth: *not many of you were wise ...; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth.*¹ Yet however we may be ranked by the society or the culture around us, each one of us has been personally picked out – elected – not by the votes of our peers but by the Almighty God Himself. The Bible assures us that each and every child of God has had God the Father voting him or her in – to *an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled ... reserved in heaven for you.*² So, for us, there is no uncertainty about a successful outcome, or about our personal mandate – our election is from God and therefore a source of inexpressible encouragement and joy!

It is a truth at the very bedrock of God's purposes for each Christian that this act of election was an eternal one, beyond the judgement of history, because it took place *before the foundation of the world.*³ This is the time, although the word is scarcely relevant in the context, when the counsels of the Godhead were meditated, deliberated and resolved into action. It is the setting for the eternal Lamb of God, *foreknown ... before the foundation of the world,*⁴ choosing freely to take on the accomplishment of the whole redemptive master plan of God.⁵ At this very same time, fellow believer, your name and my name were indissolubly associated with that plan and linked irrevocably with the One who chose to achieve it so gloriously, because at that very time *God chose us in Him.*³ When we contemplate the amazing grace of God's election of people such as us in parallel with the mutual choice of His incomparable Son to deal with our sin, are we not moved like Paul to cry, *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*⁶?

Elect according to the foreknowledge of God

We approach the truth of predestination in Romans 8:30 treading the stepping stones of Scripture, recognising that at each one we are walking on holy ground. The previous verse refers to the foreknowledge of God, a truth which the title of this section (from 1 Peter 1:2) links with our personal election in Christ.

Over the Christian centuries, much ink and not a little invective have been expended in endeavouring to balance the twin truths of divine election and God's foreknowledge. To the human mind, election – and predestination – may appear deterministic, allowing little room for human choice, particularly in the matter of salvation. It is the power of choice that makes a person truly human, and the Scriptures make abundantly clear that every individual has that power – for example the Lord Jesus said that anyone can choose whether or not to do God's will.⁷ Yet the same Lord also said – emphatically – of His disciples *All that the Father gives Me will come to Me... No one can come to Me unless the Father ...draws him,*⁸ and Luke speaks of *as many as had been appointed to eternal life* believing.⁹ These statements make clear that it is not we who choose Christ but He who first chooses us.

Some have sought to reconcile these problems into an intellectually satisfying framework by limiting the foreknowledge of God in the matter of salvation to His electing only those whom He knew in advance would respond positively to the Gospel message. This leaves room for individuals to exercise their own free will to choose according to the foreknowledge of God.

The problem with this interpretation is that limiting the power of God in any respect flies in the face of all that He has revealed about Himself to our human minds. His

*Predestined to be ...
adopted as sons*



ways are not our ways, and he is not limited by our modes of thought.¹⁰ It also fails to do justice to the fact that faith itself, although we clearly exercise it freely at salvation, is nevertheless also the gift of God; Paul emphasises that salvation is a matter of grace (from God) and not of works (by individual choice).¹¹ So the faith and repentance of an individual are not the cause of God's choice of that person, but the result. The operation of our will within God's elective purpose is not an easy concept to our limited human minds – we can only accept it by faith. Paul, by the Spirit, helps us with the example of Jacob and Esau (by human standards a simple case of sibling rivalry) by projecting its significance through God's perspective: two baby boys who had no opportunity to choose or exercise faith having the rights of primogeniture reversed so *that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls.*¹²

We are forced to acknowledge the sovereignty of God and the righteousness of all His judgements.¹³ And to rejoice that, just as the whole course and purpose of the illustrious life of the Lamb of God was foreknown by His Father before the foundation of the world,⁴ so our less exemplary lives are too.

Also predestinated to be ...

*For whom He foreknew, He also predestined.*¹⁴ God chooses people and then predestines them. Paul's argument in Romans 8 now moves to the next stepping stone of Gospel truth, from divine attributes which focus primarily on the moment of salvation to the wider context of the believer's life here – and beyond!

The concept of predestination – literally to determine beforehand – sits ill with the prevailing spirit of the age, at least in western cultures which emphasise personal freedom and minimal constraint. A common criticism is that the doctrine smacks of fatalism – that the course of life is predetermined so that what will be must be, to be borne with resignation. This would be true if the context were one of subjection to an impersonal destiny with no discernible purpose. For the Christian, however, the very opposite is thankfully true, because it is God who determines *having in love foreordained us.*¹⁵ It is God's *everlasting love*¹⁶ which is the motivating power behind what He determines, and that makes all the difference to our understanding of His determinations.

God has revealed to us His ultimate purpose, the true meaning of the universe – to subordinate everything to Christ.¹⁷ And, most movingly, Paul goes on to confirm that in this great plan *we were also chosen, having been predestined ... in conformity with the purpose of his will ... for the praise of his glory.*¹⁸ “We also” – two little words which cause us to marvel at the scope of divine elective love, embracing both our present and future existence:

Predestined to be adopted as sons.¹⁹ The force of this expression can be likened to being chosen to work for the family firm. Adoption was a familiar and

serious legal procedure for the Ephesians to whom Paul was writing. It was young adults who were normally adopted, to *receive the full rights of sons,*²⁰ in our case for *the good pleasure of His will.*¹⁹

Predestined for service. In response to the charge that belief in predestination can make the Christian lazy and complacent, Scripture makes it clear that the believer's response must be to serve the Lord in holiness. Peter calls upon us to be *even more diligent to make your calling and election sure*²¹ through active pursuit of spiritual growth. Just as the Christian can rejoice in being chosen before the universe was, so he can devote himself to identifying and performing his quota of the good works which God has *prepared in advance for us to do.*²²



Predestined for transformation. To be truly able to live to the praise of God's glory requires transformation into the image of the only Person who ever did so. That is our ultimate destiny – we cannot fail to be transformed into His likeness, because we have been predestined for it.²³ At that time, God's glory will be our glory too – destined for us since before time began (that expression again) as we enter into the reality of what God has prepared for those who love Him.²⁴ The challenge for us in this world is to make increasing progress now towards this ultimate reality – it will demand discipline and possible suffering – dying to sin so that Christ's life might be revealed in our mortal bodies.²⁵

References: (1) 1 Cor. 1:26 NIV (2) 1 Pet. 1:4 (3) Eph. 1:4 (4) 1 Pet. 1:20 RV (5) Is. 6:8 (6) Eph. 1:3 (7) John 7:17 (8) John 6:37,44 (9) Acts 13:48 (10) Is. 55:8-9 (11) Eph. 2:8-9 (12) Rom. 9:11-13 (13) Gen. 18:25; Dan. 4:35 (14) Rom. 8:29 (15) Eph. 1:4 & 5 RV margin (16) Jer. 31:3 (17) Eph. 1:9-10 (18) Eph. 1:11-12 NIV (19) Eph. 1:5-6 (20) Gal. 4:5 NIV (21) 2 Pet. 1:10 NIV (22) Eph. 2:10 NIV (23) Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18; Phil. 3:20-21 (24) 1 Cor. 2:7-10 (25) 2 Cor. 4:10

Bible quotations from NKJV unless otherwise stated

The full Gospel

Overcoming defences

Brian Johnston, Leigh, England

The success of the Gospel in capturing a person's heart has been likened to the process of capturing a castle.¹ Access to a castle in historic times was gained only as each barrier that formed its physical defences was overcome. As with all analogies, there are doubtless limitations. Each defence may not be tackled independently of the others or indeed in the order we shall take them in this and subsequent articles. However, we trust this analogy is sufficiently helpful in understanding the process of bringing the Gospel to non-Christians that it will repay us to think in these terms.

The first line of defence

The first barrier, which we may liken to a moat, is the emotional defence. The person to whom we are witnessing may be hurting. For example, a person's relationship with his or her father may, sadly, have been such that the presentation of God as the heavenly Father of all who believe in Christ as Saviour arouses strong negative emotions, making it difficult for them to place trust in God.

Bridging the Emotional Moat

This moat may be overcome by building a bridge of love that touches people's hearts. We need to accept people even when we can't approve of their behaviours. When we relate to others or meet people, we may not be sharing the gospel immediately but we should still be intentional in building a 'bridge' to get there at some later time. This is why we engage in some pre-evangelistic strategies such as community good works. The bridge we build has got to be strong enough to bear the weight of gospel truth, so we aim to befriend people. The greatest love we can express for our neighbour is to introduce them to Christ. Christ's love controls us, Paul said,² and we are to be channels of that love to others.

The second line of defence

What we may compare with the castle wall is intellectual resistance to the Gospel. Where, in this scientifically enlightened age, is the evidence for God's existence? How can there be an all-loving and all-powerful God when there is so much evil, suffering and injustice in the world?

Breaching the Intellectual Wall

In order to gain access to the mind with truth, apologetics-type arguments have a place. Peter urged his readers to be able to give a reasoned basis for the Christian hope.³ Apologetics is not evangelism, but is often a necessary support for it. Our appeal, as Paul's, is to their conscience which we seek to enlist on the side of truth.⁴ The use of questions can expose the incoherence of all other



worldviews. We can be bold, for the intellectual strength of Christianity is stronger than all other options, despite some dismissing it as foolishness.⁵

The final line of defence

Like an imposing tower, the volitional defence presents itself. This is the barrier of the will. Our work of showing care and communicating authentically has been done; any further work must now be God's. Our part now is urgent, passionate prayer as we invite someone to come to Christ.⁶ We are asking them to do something which they, by themselves, are incapable of doing. God is sovereign, but holds us responsible. No more than 'God wills' to be saved will be saved; but equally, no less than 'whoever wills' will be saved.

Scaling the Volitional Tower

It's at this stage that providing illustrations of the gospel often proves helpful. The volitional barrier, the tower, is overcome as the will is surrendered and Christ's lordship is recognized.⁷ This is done whenever God grants repentance: a radical turning from sin to God.⁸ The call to repentance should never be diluted whenever we counsel sinners whom we believe are under conviction of sin.⁹ They must be left in no doubt as to their need¹⁰ and inability;¹¹ as well as God's provision¹² and requirement, namely to repent and believe on the Lord Jesus.⁷

References: (1) D.A. Carson (Ed), Telling the Truth, Zondervan, 2002 (2) 2 Cor. 5:14 (3) 1 Pet. 3:15 (4) 2 Cor. 4:2 (5) 1 Cor. 1:25 (6) Rom. 10:1 (7) Acts 16:31 (8) 2 Tim. 2:25 (9) Acts 20:21; John 16:8 (10) Rom. 3:23 (11) Is. 64:6 (12) John 3:16

Letter writing

Introduction

Martin Jones, Toronto, Canada

You wouldn't think that the act of writing a letter was particularly dynamic, would you? But the art of written communication is changing all the time. If you're under 30, do you know when the convention is to sign off a letter with 'yours sincerely' or 'yours faithfully'? (Which one you choose tells you something interesting about the relationship between the author and the recipient of the letter.) In the French language, the rise of communicating by tweets and texts has contributed to the use of the informal "tu", in situations where the formal "vous" would have been used in the past; and let's not get into talking about "txting"!

If things have changed over the last 30 years, imagine how much things have changed in the 2,000 years since the apostle Paul wrote his letters! Although Peter was probably thinking more about substance than style when he said that what Paul wrote could be difficult to understand – nevertheless, modern readers need all the help they can get to really get to grips with them. So, in 2013 NTs, we're going to be taking a closer look at Paul's letters.

Professor Richard Longenecker points out that there are three ways to approach what Paul wrote:

1) **Devotionally** – this is something that you've been doing since you became a disciple and it's vital in helping you to learn more about God and how He wants you to live, amongst other things. But reading this way can have its dangers; for example, if you take verses out of context and incorrectly apply them (deliberately or accidentally!) to force-fit your own situation and/or what you might like to hear.

2) **Homiletically** – if you've ever sought to explain Paul's writings to a person, either in a public forum or privately, then you have likely taken this approach, perhaps without knowing it. Reading to distil a message in a homily for others can give very different results – you might try to boil the content down to an essence and/or find creative ways to slice and dice it for easy digestion. Every Christian needs this skill, for each of us has a responsibility to preach; but there are dangers here also, especially if you cut corners and over-simplify, build flawed explanatory models or fail to practise what you preach!

3) **Academically** – some Christians frown on an academic reading of Paul's letters and even view it as unnecessary, pointing to the Reformers' teaching on 1) "perspicuity" of Scripture (i.e., that Scripture is clear in its basic message and can be understood by everyone as to the essential content of that message; that Scripture is lucid and understandable, even to those of limited intellect and



different cultures), and (2) the effectiveness of the Spirit in illuminating the Scriptures and witnessing to Christ. While these are true, an academic approach can greatly enhance the other two approaches – in fact, employing all three is important to get the most from Paul's writings when looking to transition from 'milk to meat'.¹

It is the academic approach to Paul's letters that will be the primary focus of this series – or at least the merest taste of just one or two of a series of distinct disciplines that, overall, aim to help with the following:

- the history of interpretation – how have Christians interpreted the letters down the ages?
- understanding epistolary structures and conventions (i.e. the art of letter-writing)
- noticing modes of presentation and persuasion (e.g. the use of rhetoric)
- unlocking the meaning of words, phrases, idioms, expressions and sentences in the text (philology)
- comparing and contrasting with Jewish and Greek culture and literature
- identifying early church 'confessional' material in the text
- tracing the development of thought and expression on a topic in Scripture
- supporting the authenticity and the accuracy of Scripture translations

Of course, an academic approach should also be approached with caution – it should never be an end in itself, nor is priding oneself on one's knowledge ever acceptable; there is also a risk of futile research that becomes so arcane as to be of no practical use!

In the next issue of NT, our main focus will be a look at the openings and closings of Paul's letters to see what we can learn from them.

Reference: (1) 1 Cor. 3:2

One-anothering

Stir up one another to good works

Richard Hutchinson, Cullybackey, N.Ireland

The Christian faith is not something to be held alone. God has called us to be together in our faith, and our fellowship together not only reaps all kinds of benefits, but it brings responsibilities to one another.

So why does it matter so much? Firstly we're looking at the exhortation: *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.*¹ It's important not to limit our idea of what good works means to charitable acts. The word 'good' here does not only mean morally good, but can mean beautiful, precious, useful, and even beneficial to the mind.

Good works are our focus here, and it's a matter of perhaps more importance than we often see it given. We have been *created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God has prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.*² Our purpose as a new creation in Christ³ is to walk in the good works God has laid out for us to do. Paul told Titus not only that he was to be 'a model of good works',⁴ but that the Lord Jesus had given Himself for us, not only to redeem us from all lawlessness but to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.⁵ He wanted a people who would not follow their own sinful desires but would follow His will, and where our own desires produce lawlessness, God's will leads to good works. Twice in his letter to Titus, Paul expresses his desire that the people would devote themselves to good works, saying that they are *excellent and profitable for people*⁶ and that they may *not be unfruitful.*⁷ Not only do those works please God, but they bless and build up the doers and they testify to others about His goodness. The Lord told His disciples in the Sermon on the Mount, "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see

your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."⁸

Notice, they were to stir up, or provoke, each other to produce good works. It's a strange word to choose, being used largely in a negative sense, such as the sharp contention of Paul and Barnabas in Acts 15:39. The Greek word is *paroxusmos*, from which the medical community will recognise our word 'paroxysm', which is the sudden attack or worsening of a disease, or more generally a violent fit of emotion. It's closely related to another word for 'provoke', *paroxuno*, which is literally 'to sharpen alongside', or to goad.

So why did the writer choose *paroxusmos* as his word for stimulate? There are certainly gentler words he could have opted for to get the sense of stirring up or stimulating. Perhaps it is that the Hebrew Christians were already provoking one another to less than beautiful works, to anger and jealousy and strife rather than to love. It may be that this was why some were *neglecting to meet together*, because clashing personalities were making church a difficult place to be. We can easily irritate and agitate others into fits of emotion, and we see that too often. Some have walked away from their fellowship with the Lord over no longer being able to bear the fellowship of their fellow Christians. The writer here is encouraging them that, when they are together, their company and their talk, their actions for one another should all be provocation, but provocation to love and beautiful things done together and for each other. Time spent in each other's company should be enlivening and inspiring, a stimulus to do more and do better for the Lord we serve together. So how do we ensure that we are provoking the right way?

We are to 'consider' one another in order that we can have that effect – and the word means to understand, to perceive or discover – to actively engage one's mind to that end – something that is to be done fully or intensely. If we don't take the time to know and understand our brothers and sisters in the Lord, we will not provoke them to love and good works, but we will still provoke them. Let's not presume we know people, no matter how long we've been in a church with them. It's too easy to have a casual relationship with someone one day of every week, but that's not fellowship and it's not what being in a Church of God is meant to be. If we want to continue steadfastly in the Fellowship then let's actively work together at knowing each other more.

References: (1) Heb. 10:24-25 (2) Eph. 2:10 (3) 2 Cor. 5:17 (4) Titus 2:7 (5) Titus 2:14 (6) Titus 3:8 (7) Titus 3:14 (8) Mat. 5:16 Bible quotations from ESV



Ineffectual prayer?

George Prasher

Under the heading, ‘Prayer that went unanswered’, a UK magazine report asserted that ‘when it comes to healing the sick, the power of prayer is not effective.’

This conclusion was drawn from the results of an elaborately organized study in the United States, costing \$2.4 million.¹ Three Christian congregations were asked to pray for 1800 heart surgery patients. Prayer was to continue for two weeks after the surgery took place. They were to ask God that the patient might have ‘a quick and healthy recovery, and no complications’.

The patients were divided into three groups: those who knew they were being prayed for; those prayed for without their knowledge; and those who were not prayed for at all. In both the second and third groups 52% suffered complications. So did 59% of those who knew they were being prayed for.

Scriptural examples of God’s working in direct response to prayer for healing bodily illness are instructive. They clearly illustrate that He acts according to His sovereign will in the circumstances of our individual lives. For example, when Hezekiah, king of Judah was sick and near death, *Isaiah the prophet ... said to him, “Thus says the LORD: ‘Set your house in order, for you shall die and not live.’”*²

*Then Hezekiah turned his face toward the wall, and prayed to the LORD, and said, “Remember now, O LORD, I pray, how I have walked before You in truth and with a loyal heart, and have done what is good in Your sight.” And Hezekiah wept bitterly.*³ Before Isaiah had left the palace court God’s word came to him again: *“Go and tell Hezekiah, ‘Thus says the LORD, the God of David your father: “I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; surely I will add to your days fifteen years” ...”*⁴

By contrast, although the apostle Paul pleaded with the Lord three times to remove what he described as *a thorn in the flesh*, his request was not granted.⁵ Paul came to understand that this was *lest [he] should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations* he had received.⁶

The expression ‘unanswered prayer’ perhaps lends itself to misunderstanding. God’s response to Hezekiah’s supplication and tears we see clearly as answered prayer. Was not His negative response to Paul’s prayer equally an answer? We have to recognize that whether the answer to prayer for recovery from illness is positive or negative, God has heard our prayers:

‘And whether Thou dost give or not,
’Tis love that grants, and love denies.’⁷

It has been helpfully said that ‘prayers of faith are answered, not simply because they are prayed in faith, but only if they are prayed in the will of God’. As we read in



1 John 5:14, *Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.*

God is glorified when the believer’s faith remains unshaken despite disappointment when He does not grant the recovery from illness we naturally so much desire. For in infinite wisdom and love He sees so far beyond our limited understanding.

There is of course abundant Christian testimony to God’s remarkable working in response to prayer for healing from illness. Is it not true that all healing derives from Him through the processes built into our physical constitution? David’s words reflect this truth:

*Bless the LORD, O my soul;
And forget not all His benefits:
Who forgives all your iniquities,
Who heals all your diseases.*⁸

In circumstances of serious illness the Christian believer instinctively takes refuge in God, with earnest prayer that He may grant healing and restoration. Sometimes this may not be God’s will, but frequently He uses the medical treatment to bring about recovery. Even with cases where the patient’s survival seems medically improbable, there are at times dramatic recoveries following special exercise in prayer.

Thankfully, let us pray without ceasing, assured that we have a God who hears and answers prayer.

Unto thee, O LORD, will I call; my rock, be not thou deaf unto me:

Lest, if thou be silent unto me,

*I become like them that go down into the pit.*⁹

References: (1) American Heart Journal April 2006; 151, Study of the Therapeutic Effects of Intercessory Prayer (STEP) in cardiac bypass patients: a multicenter randomized trial of uncertainty and certainty of receiving intercessory prayer (2) Is. 38:1 (3) Is. 38:2-3 (4) Is. 38:5 (5) 2 Cor. 12:7-9 (6) 2 Cor. 12:7 (7) T.Kelly (8) Ps. 103:2-3 (9) Ps. 28:1 RV

Bible quotations from NKJV unless otherwise stated

All on the altar for God

The burnt offering

Martin Archibald, Paisley, Scotland

We take ourselves back in thought to the days of Israel's passing through the wilderness, and visualize how ...

Nahshon rose with the dawn that day, for which he had waited to present his gift. He drew aside his tent-door to study the pillar above the great Tent at the centre of the camp. Its fiery base now towered into bright cloud touched by the ascending sun. If it rose up, they'd have to wait for another day, for soon the trumpets would ring out, and Nahshon's household would pack at once, to lead Judah at the head of the clans on the march.¹

For Nahshon was the prince, and he gave thanks silently to the Lord, since he had been richly blessed with a loving wife, sons and daughters, multiplying herds, and the respect of his people. So now the servants, too, would join him in making a fitting return to their merciful God. As they left Sinai they had presented an ox for the wagon that was to bear the sanctuary fittings, with gold and silver vessels, and more, for the consecration of the altar.² But that was required of their position – more like an honour to them. Nahshon had a deeper personal appreciation to express. So he had set aside their finest bull after close inspection, and, yes, the cloud was still above the Tent, and they'd all take care to keep themselves clean, to sacrifice a young bull today.³ All the household set out through the camp, though they knew that no-one would receive meat, for everything was for God, except the hide for the priest. It was a 'whole offering', to be wholly consumed on the altar.

At the curtain-gate of the court, Nahshon stepped forward to explain his purpose and allow the bull to be checked. Then came the hardest part: to lay his hand on its head and kill this creature that had been so carefully reared. The family watched his hand, and the knife, and all felt the pain – they were all so closely involved! The priest caught the blood in a bowl and sprinkled it against the altar, at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting – where the family could watch. Nahshon then flayed the skin and cut



out the parts, washed the inwards and the legs, and passed all to the priest to lay on the burning wood. This giving to God was unforgettable for them all, and no light matter for the priests, though they dealt with so many sacrifices.

Then the family of the prince of Judah made its way home, sobered by the emotional cost of it all, yet glad that they had been able to honour the Lord in accord with the Law.

This illustrative example is characteristic of the burnt offerings Israel made collectively as God's people. The apostle Paul teaches that those people *all ... drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ.*⁴ So it may be that the most thoughtful of them also wondered what the detailed guidance in the Law could mean, since it came from the Lord. Surely the God who included so much kindness and fairness in His law must mean more than met the eye!

The 'whole offering' today

The Christian believer today has the benefit of New Testament light on that *shadow of the good things to come.*⁵ Those committed to forming a people for God are called to worship together as *a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ,*⁶ the *great high priest.*⁷ Our sacrifices are expressed verbally, but have some correspondence in purpose to what those Israelites brought, and this includes bringing to God something that will capture the 'whole offering' aspect pictured above. Hebrews 10:19-21 shows that the Breaking of the Bread is a fit setting for this priestly activity, for bread and wine symbolize the body and blood of our Lord, through which we enter the holy place above. As we express our appreciation, what could excel in our thoughts the worth of Christ to God? The focus is not only on Christ as our saviour, but precious on how God saw His Son accept the humblest places on earth, among people plagued with sin, yet offer all of Himself, unhindered, to the service of the Father. That was the 'whole offering' of all time! To have something to say worthy of that subject, we need to know more of our God and of His Christ. We will find it not solely in studying God's dealings with man, but also in meditation upon Christ's character, even prompted by our experience of Him and of Christ in daily life.

The prime offering

The burnt offering had prime place in the series ordained in Leviticus, and elsewhere in the Bible. Before the Law was given, it was offered by Noah in deep thankfulness for deliverance from the Flood. By it, Abraham signalled his reverence for the greatness of the God who had called



him into eternal blessing. It was the burnt offering that was to be upon the altar morning and evening at the gateway to the Tent, to sanctify the meeting point of God with His people, and to allow Him to dwell with them.⁸ Today it guides us into the highest elevation of His people's praise.

Acceptance at one place

To be acceptable, the offering had to be without defect. The offerer must also lay his hand on its head, ... *and it will be accepted on his behalf, to make atonement for him.*⁹ We also are wonderfully accepted because God sees us in the perfection of His Son.

The sacrifice must be brought to the place where God caused His name to dwell, enabling fellowship before the Lord. This point was renewed when Israel entered the land.¹⁰ The thought of one centre is again implied in Solomon's prayer before the Temple, and today in the prime importance of worshipping collectively in God's one house. Is this not a reminder of the completeness of the Lord's design for service – that He wishes us to be together before Him, that each might have a sense of belonging, like those gathered as one before the Tent? My offering is intended to have an enriching effect on others who have fellowship with me at the Lord's table, as part of a holy priesthood worshipping in the heavenly tent which the Lord pitched.

God's regard for the individual

Israel's worshipper could bring a male from the herd, the flock (of sheep or goats), or a dove. This was allowance for the means of the individual – a sign of God's regard for the circumstances of each worshipper, like many precepts in His law. Paul taught that ... *if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not ... what one does not have.*¹¹ It is heart-warming that our God loves first our willingness, and then also, He is delighted to recognise when a smaller offering (as it may

seem to us) comes from the equally felt exercise of the less endowed.

The prince of life and glory

What then should the prize young male of the herd or flock mean to us? Here is the picture of the guarantor of healthy growth in future stock, their ever present guardian, and strength to plough for sowing. Here is Christ the young prince in the prime of life, dedicated to serve His Father's will. Three times the burnt offering is called 'an aroma pleasing to the Lord' - not attractive to man, but precious to God. Surely there is a voice here for our service too, calling us to give ourselves first to the Lord, as Paul appreciated in the example of the Macedonians.¹²

The washing of inner parts and legs next speaks to us of the Lord's inner integrity, found also in His pure walk, whether clearing out the profiteers from the Temple courts, or, tired from His journey, to find one woman by the well – as no Jew had ever done – and many more from the town.

Then we saw that Nahshon and his family watched from the gateway the blood sprinkled and the parts uncovered and presented on the altar. So with us:

'We hear the words of love,
We gaze upon the blood,
We see the mighty Sacrifice,
And we have peace with God.'¹³

The mind of Christ

The head of the sacrificed animal is specially mentioned, speaking to us of the mind of Christ, directed always into doing the will of the Father. We see mind and heart in harmony of will on the last night with His own, when He loved them to the end, took a towel and water, and washed their feet. They had been in mind all those days since He went into Galilee to seek them out.¹⁴ Lastly, we may have a poor opinion of fat today, but it is properly the energy-store and sign of nourishment, and since it was, in all the offerings, placed on the altar, again we see God's delight in his Son.¹⁵

Lastly, may we ask what **you** see in the care taken with the ashes?

References: (1) Num. 2:3 (2) Num. 7:1-12 (3) Lev. 1:5 (4) 1 Cor. 10:3-4 (5) Heb. 10:1 RV; 8:5 (6) 1 Pet. 2:5 (7) Heb. 4:14 (8) Ex. 29:42-46 (9) Lev. 1:4 (10) Deut. 12:4-12 (11) 2 Cor. 8:12 (12) 2 Cor. 8:5 (13) H. Bonar PHSS 86 (14) John 1:43 (15) Cp. Ps. 26:1-3

Bible quotations from NIV unless stated otherwise

Christ in Isaiah

The Chosen Servant

Edwin Neely, Brantford, Canada

*“Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold;
My chosen one in whom My soul delights.
I have put My Spirit upon Him;
He will bring forth justice to the nations.
He will not cry out or raise His voice,
Nor make His voice heard in the street.
A bruised reed He will not break
And a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish;
He will faithfully bring forth justice.
He will not be disheartened or crushed
Until He has established justice in the earth;
And the coastlands will wait expectantly for His law.”¹*

Isaiah makes four references to Christ as the Servant of the LORD (*Yahweh*);² this is the first. Some Bible scholars have seen this as a reference to Israel, some to Cyrus, some to Isaiah himself or to the prophets as a group. They use such verses as 41:8; 42:19; 49:3 and 49:5 as justification for their hypotheses, but Matthew 12:15-21 makes very clear that Isaiah’s prophecy here is fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ. No other individual or nation could have shown the tenderness and restraint necessary, nor fulfilled the mandate to establish justice in the world, try as they might. Christ alone (on whom the Spirit not only came, but rested and moved Him in everything He did) was upheld by His God throughout His whole earthly existence. He alone is God’s chosen vessel, never failing or discouraged, no matter what trials and temptations Satan might put in His way, until God’s kingdom is come, universal justice is established, His will is done on earth as it is in heaven. To display His tenderness and grace Christ took on Himself the form of a servant,³ serving God and man, coming not to be served, but to serve,⁴ and to give His life as a ransom: ‘Pattern Servant, doing all God’s will below.’⁵

At the cross men jeered at the Lord Jesus: “*Commit yourself to the LORD; let Him deliver him; let Him rescue him, because He delights in him.*”⁶ The question remains: if He was unique in all His ways, peerless, incomparable, daily the Father’s delight, why was He the One chosen? The task to set things straight in all the earth involved the Calvary experience, being emptied, enslaved, humbled, obedient even to death on the cross. The simple answer is that He was the only one who was worthy.⁷ And to accomplish the work, God upheld Him, took firm hold of Him and kept Him upright;⁸ God would not leave Him alone⁹ and even in punishing Him for sin would feel every blow delivered. God would sustain Him in every endeavour, even to the bringing of justice to the Gentiles. The choice involved supplying Him with all divine power

in giving Him the fullness of the Spirit. His Father bore testimony to that choice on the Mount of Transfiguration: “*This is My Son, My Chosen One.*”¹⁰ He was *rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God.*¹¹ Marvel of marvels: He was the Chosen One long before the foundation of the earth, and we, through divine grace and mercy, were chosen in Him that we should be *holy and blameless before Him!*¹² He came for the consolation of Israel, anointed to bring good news to the afflicted, but He was also *a light of revelation to the Gentiles.*¹³ For this He would not surrender any of the attributes of deity, but would assume the limitations of humanity and the setting aside of some of His divine prerogatives during the period of His time on earth.

The Lord Jesus Christ was, and is, God’s Chosen One; there was no one else who could accomplish the divine will. Through obedience and self-denial in voluntary submission to the Father (for He was in every sense on equality with God) He won sovereignty over all people and things; to Him alone has been given all judgment;¹⁴ He is the only one in heaven or on earth worthy of such honour;¹⁵ He was the only one slain for all mankind and resurrected from the dead in victory.¹⁶ His obedience and self-denial are also an example of godliness to all who are chosen and elect in Him. Wherefore God has given Him the name above every name, the place high over all.¹⁷

References: (1) Isaiah 42:1-4 (NASB) (2) Is. 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12 (3) Phil. 2:7 (4) Mat. 20:28 (5) C.Belton PHSS 3 (6) Ps. 22:8 (7) Rev. 5:4-5 (8) Keil and Delitzsch, Commentary on the Old Testament: Isaiah, (Chapter 42, verse 1) p. 175: “*Tamakh b’* means to lay firm hold of and keep upright.” (9) John 16:32 (10) Luke 9:35 (11) 1 Pet. 2:4 (12) Eph. 1:4 (13) Luke 2:32 (14) John 5:22; Acts 10:42; 17:31 (15) Rev. 5:5 (16) Rev. 5:9 (17) Phil. 2:9-11

Bible quotations from NASB



Musical musings

An interview with Peter Sweetmore, Cardiff, Wales

Have you always been interested in hymns?

Yes: I started singing in a church choir when I was six; joined my grammar school choir when I was eleven; sang in various youth choirs up to age seventeen; and have participated in both leading and singing in groups over many years in the Churches of God.

What kind of hymns do you like?

I love both traditional hymns and modern hymns; recognising many excellent Christian songwriters of the present day who have a fresh approach to Christian music.

Do you consider yourself to be a poet or a musician?

Not really: I can't pretend to have the same poetic skills as Cecil Belton or the musical skills of Ernest Birchall (to name two previous musicians in the Churches of God); but I love the great themes of the gospel and the glories of our risen Saviour and Lord. The worship of God in the Holies is frequently in my heart and thoughts; and it is these simple thoughts that seem to express themselves in verse.

How did you come to write hymns for the use of the churches of God?

I was asked to help on the two committees which produced the hymn book supplements, and I realised that

there was a great paucity of suitable hymns for the Remembrance after trawling through about eighty hymn books for suitable compositions. So I felt urged to try to meet the need.

How did you go about it?

Every hymn needs a good tune. My first hymn used the slow movement from Dvorak's *New World Symphony*; several subsequent hymns were written to Welsh tunes little known outside Wales. Although I am not Welsh, I have lived in Wales for nearly fifty years and have learned to love Welsh culture and particularly Welsh hymns. There is nothing quite like a *Cymanfa Ganu* – Welsh hymn singing on a grand scale! We already sing hymns to Aberystwyth, Cwm Rhondda, Arwelfa, and Hyfrydol. But there are many more gems which deserve a wider use.

These are very traditional tunes: have you tried using modern tunes?

Traditional tunes with four part harmony are most suitable for Fellowship service as we often have no accompaniment; but I would love to be able to write or use modern tunes if there were no copyright issues.

How do you put the words together?

As I have indicated already, the expressions, the phrases and the



themes, are those which come from my heart in worship; and in meditating on them, the thoughts evolve into rhyme. I would like to think it is the Holy Spirit who crafts these stanzas. Mind you, from my earliest days in Stoke, a beloved Christian brother there encouraged me to memorise hymns, which I have always done; and sometimes words or expressions may unwittingly creep into what I am writing.

Are there any more to come?

There are three more hymns waiting for another hymn book, all to fine Welsh tunes. If the opportunity were to arise, I would probably write some devotional type hymns for more general use. It is a good use of holidays!



Family over faith?

Peter Hickling, Cromer, England

In August 2012 the BBC commissioned a poll among 585 16-24 year olds, where they were asked to choose the most important moral issue for them, from a list of eight options. The results were:

Looking after their family	59%
Putting others first	12%
Being faithful to a partner	8%
Caring for the environment	5%
Having religious faith	4%
Paying taxes	4%
Playing a part in the local community	4%
Buying ethical products	1%

Alarming for believers? Perhaps. The poll was presented as part of a 'Religion and Ethics Festival', but it is apparent that it says much more about the people who commissioned it than it does about the young people. Their press release¹ was headed 'BBC RE-THINK 2012 poll sees young people choose family over faith', but the survey itself was deeply flawed. The respondents could only choose one item, when they obviously interact, and the questioners did not reveal how representative the sample was. This makes a big difference: only 24% of white British of this age were 'religious', while 97% of Bangladeshis were.

If so few young people think that religious faith matters, but more than 70% would put family and others first the fault lies in believers, for inadequate communication. The things listed are all good things, of varying importance, and we might feel able to put them in order, but ultimately we must ask why they are called 'good'. Education has failed if it does not make people ask, "Why?" It does not consist in learning things, even religious things, but in making people think. A thoroughgoing believer in natural selection might say that doing good things tends towards the preservation of our own genes, but this is not true of all. Self-preservation might make us do things



Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world. (Jas. 1:27)

that are harmful to others, even our own family. Faith in a God who is good and loving gives us an absolute benchmark against which practical actions can be tested. Jesus Christ, God's Son lived among men and died for men to show that goodness and love by His actions; this is the basic fact that people need to know and believe.

Once this basic benchmark has been accepted all the others flow from it. The Bible is full of these things, many from the mouth of Jesus Himself. The three most frequent responses in the BBC questionnaire are all there: *But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever;*² *Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others;*³ *You shall not commit adultery.*⁴ So it seems that the young people questioned had an innate sense of what was good.

Why then do they think so little of 'religion', but value the things that should come from it? The reason is that 'religion' has come to be associated with a dry formal observance, without any practical result, yet this is far from what it should really be. The only Scriptural definition of religion is James 1:27: *Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.* It is heartening if these things that are good are really valued, but Christians need to help others to understand that it's just not possible to do them on our own: to try to do that is to put the cart before the horse. Faith leads to action, not the other way round.

References: (1) BBC RE-THINK 2012 Religion and Ethics Festival (2) 1 Tim. 5:8 (3) Phil. 2:3-4 (4) Ex. 20:14

Bible quotations from ESV

The 'heavenlies' in Ephesians

Where our blessings are

Alex Reid, Leigh, England

The expression 'heavenly places' is used five times in the Epistle to the Ephesians. The word 'places' is in italics in some English Bibles, to show that it is not part of the original Greek text. Translators have added it in order to give the full sense in English of the Greek word, which is a plural adjective without any subject. The word 'heavenly' is a translation of a Greek word of which F. F. Bruce says: 'The adjective *epouranios* occurs several times in the New Testament, but this particular use of the neuter plural is specially characteristic of Ephesians'.¹ The word 'heavenlies' is therefore a rendering of the Greek plural and is the word used in the title of this series of articles.

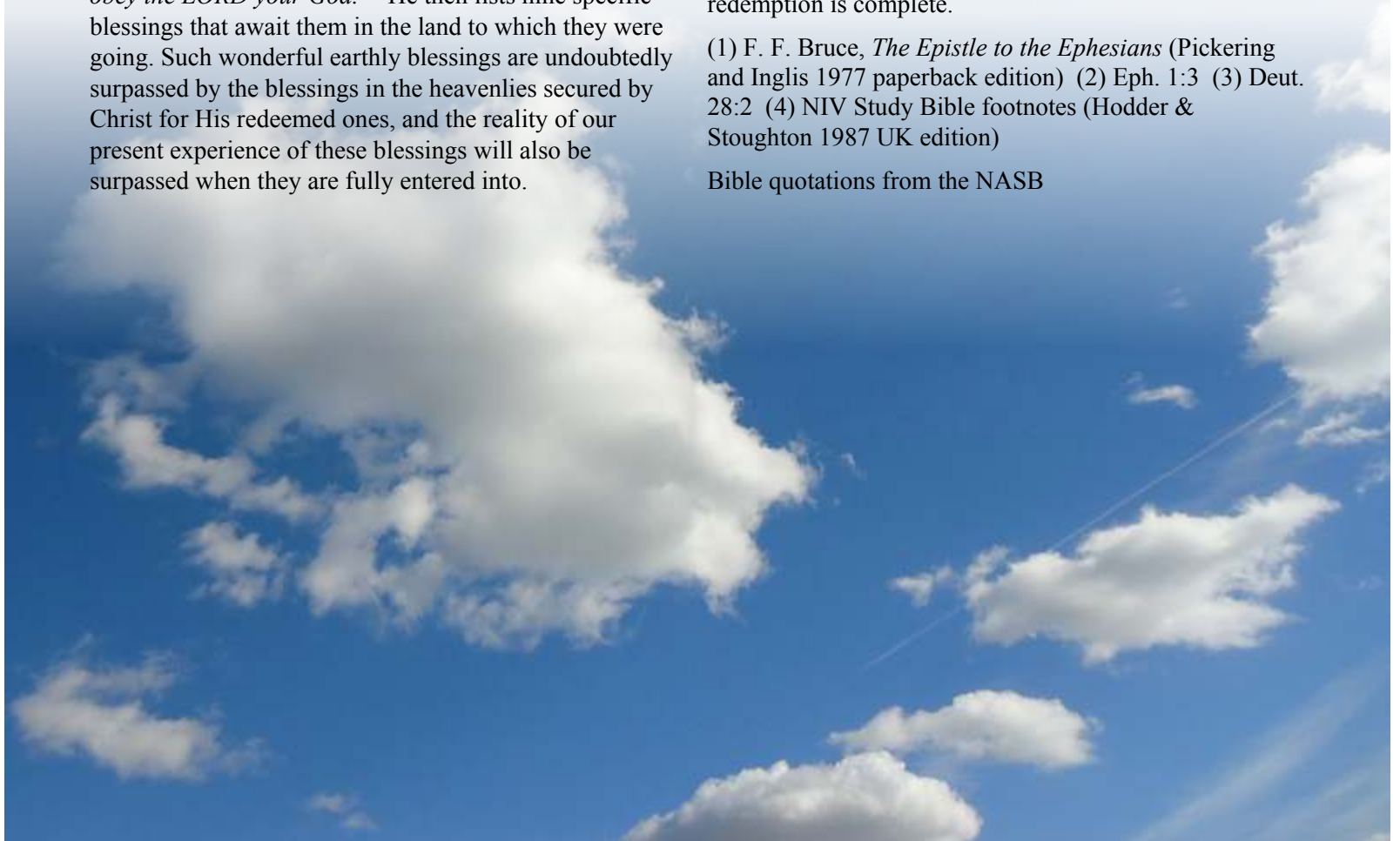
What and where are the 'heavenlies' as described in Ephesians? Verse 20 of chapter 1 gives us the answer: ... *which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places.* The heavenly places are where Christ is, at God's right hand. They are also the place where the believer's spiritual blessings are located.²

In Deuteronomy 28:1-14, Moses outlines the blessings that lay in store for the nation of Israel in the land that God had promised them. Moses declares: "*All these blessings will come upon you and overtake you if you obey the LORD your God.*"³ He then lists nine specific blessings that await them in the land to which they were going. Such wonderful earthly blessings are undoubtedly surpassed by the blessings in the heavenlies secured by Christ for His redeemed ones, and the reality of our present experience of these blessings will also be surpassed when they are fully entered into.

Concerning these spiritual blessings, we are told: *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ ...*² The wording is in the past tense, showing that the conferring of the blessings is an accomplished fact and that the believer already possesses them. How can this be, since multitudes of believers are not yet in heaven, but still pilgrims here in this world? These blessings are conferred 'in Christ', which is a key concept in the Epistle to the Ephesians. In chapter 1, verses 3-14 are all one sentence in the original Greek text, and form what many Bible students view as being a doxology of praise to God, in which the wonderful things He has done for believers are listed.⁴ In this paean of praise the expression 'in Christ' or 'in Him' is used nine times, and a further twice in the rest of the chapter. These verses allow us to see things from God's perspective. He sees believers as already possessing the spiritual blessings, for they are united with Christ. They therefore possess and enjoy the blessings as a spiritual reality while still here on earth. In fact, Ephesians 1:14 seems to indicate both 'now and not yet' aspects to these secure realities. As Israel's blessings in the land were already secured by God's promises, but only fully possessed when they arrived there, likewise blessings secured for us in Christ will only be entered into fully when God's redemption is complete.

(1) F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (Pickering and Inglis 1977 paperback edition) (2) Eph. 1:3 (3) Deut. 28:2 (4) NIV Study Bible footnotes (Hodder & Stoughton 1987 UK edition)

Bible quotations from the NASB



YFR

Keith Dorricott, Toronto, Canada

When I arrived at the first YFR at old Kinmel Hall in North Wales in June 1992, it reminded me of what it must have been like for those early disciples almost 2000 years ago when the churches of God first came into existence. There were so many disciples, from so many places, all together in one place, enjoying being taught from the Lord, having real spiritual fellowship with each other, and joining together in serving the Lord. It was a very happy time.

Actually, YFR (the Youth Fellowship Rally) began at Mount Forest teen camp in Canada in the late 1980s. Some young men from Britain and Canada were together and began discussing the possibility of having an event like this. One thing led to another, and it was arranged – which was a huge undertaking. Some overseers were concerned about this ‘grassroots movement’, and I can remember being asked to answer questions at an overseers’ conference beforehand, to assure them that everything was OK – which it certainly was. The event was timed to coincide with the 100th anniversary of the restoration of the Fellowship. Arthur Chamings, 88 years old, was one of the speakers! Many long-lasting friendships were formed among the roughly 400 people there, who had great times of singing. Four full-time Lord’s servants got up one day and shared their personal stories, which had quite an impact. The highlight of the whole event, however, was on the Sunday morning when we all gathered for the Remembrance with the Church of God in Rhyl. No one had ever been at such a large Remembrance, and there was hardly a gap in the offerings of praise. Then the concluding talk of the event was by Kevin Jones on the subject of “Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do amazing things among you”, from Joshua 3:5. So we all set off with intentions of doing just that, and hopes of being back 4 years later.

Four years later we were back, again at Kinmel Hall, with the topic ‘Carpe Diem – Seize the Day’. Again it was outstanding, with many there. Then in the year 2002 it moved to the University of Nottingham and the topic was ‘Going Deeper’. I remember a gospel meeting held on the Sunday. I had been asked to get up and thank Phil Capewell,



Kinmel Hall

the speaker, afterwards. When I got up and looked out at the large audience I couldn’t see a soul, due to the lighting. I realized he had given that great gospel message staring into darkness!

The next two were both at Cefn Lea in mid-Wales; in 2004 the topic was ‘Jesus 24/7’ and in 2008 it was ‘Turn & See’, based on John’s great vision of the Lord in Revelation chapter 1. By now it was clear – despite its name, that YFR wasn’t just for young people. People of all ages were coming to enjoy the event and mix with one another. It’s such an encouragement and uplift to be part of a group of 300 to 400 enthusiastic disciples 24/7, who truly want to grow in their Christian lives.

This past summer I was able to be at my sixth YFR (yes, I’ve been to them all) – again at Cefn Lea. It was perhaps the best ever, although that’s a common feeling when things go really well. Christians were there from Jamaica, West Africa, Australia, USA, Canada and all over the UK. The talks were outstanding on the theme of ‘The Battle’ – our vital special warfare with our adversary. The singing was again very moving, helped by the song leaders and bands. The breakout groups were very useful to many people, as I repeatedly heard. The fellowship was at a premium level – it wasn’t just socializing, it was sharing important concerns and joys. And there were a lot of children there (the future of our churches) – who all came out on the last night and recited their Bible verses, dressed in costumes for ‘The Battle’. And then the next morning off we went to Birmingham for another wonderful Remembrance - again the highlight!

I know for a fact that the Lord changed some lives at the 2012 YFR, just as I know He had in previous years. May He continue to do that every 4 years until He returns.