


NT

A pattern for life in God's House



Raised, seated, exalted
Forgiving one another
A tangible closeness

The full Gospel:
bridging the emotional moat

Issue 2 2013

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From the Editors' desk

The need for faith

Since our last issue the astrologic Chinese New Year has been celebrated by more than a billion people, Hindu devotees have flocked in their millions to wash in the Ganges, Easter has been enjoyed perhaps by more non-Christians than Christians, and Passover has reminded not only the Jews, of the need for one true God who can really deliver.

Faith is dividing the world as much as ever before, despite the trend to secularism in at least the western world. So-called fundamentalists on the extremes of each religion race to force everyone into the same box of rules. (See the article on Fighting for a Faith.) It is understandable then, why so many educated people prefer to ditch all religious belief and rely on naturalism to answer questions of faith. Questions requiring faith are unavoidable; the issue is in what you place faith, not whether faith is required. Belief in something requiring this favoured earth to have been populated by aliens, or to be part of a multiverse with similarly unexplainable origins, requires (for the writer at least) more faith than it takes to believe in the God of the Bible, or the Bible – from that one true God – as a rule for life.

That so many billions are prepared to exercise faith in a non-Christian way is perhaps demoralizing, but not surprising, for followers of Christ. It is an uphill struggle, but one our Leader warned about through His apostles.¹ The Scriptures that the Jews may treasure, and which Christ upheld, declare that momentous times would come in which *many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase*.² It is hard to think of a more concise description of the present day. Christ warned His disciples that to remain faithful to Him may eventually be a life-or-death decision, for He said: *“the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service”*.³

In such a world, and in anticipation of such a time, what should we include in the pages of this magazine? We focus on the Gospel, the amazing grace of God to deliver sinners from the doom they deserve. How can we effectively communicate it? We look at practical ways in which Christians should exemplify their love for, and reliance on, one another. Among other things, we try to understand how God could use a book written by so many different people over millennia, using all the nuances of their varying writing styles, to bring the message we need to this present world. And then we extract ourselves for a moment or two from all the trial, trauma and triviality of this physical world to get a glimpse of what God is doing in the heavens, where Christ sits at the right hand of God, and stimulate an attitude of worship.

Enjoy your reading!

Geoff

References: (1) e.g. 2 Tim. 3:1 (2) Dan. 12:4 (3) John 16:2 NKJV



Betrayed!

Gilbert Grierson, Knocknacloy, N.Ireland

Although nothing could ever surprise the Lord Jesus Christ – for His divine omniscience meant He knew the end from the beginning – still, in His experience of manhood, He knew what it was to be deeply hurt. The prophet Isaiah wrote that the Messiah would be a *man of sorrows*.¹ His pain would not only be physical, but spiritual and also emotional.

What causes deeper emotional pain than to be betrayed! The Lord Jesus was not just betrayed by an enemy, but by someone who was very close to Him – a friend and a companion. David, writing by the Spirit in the Psalms, expressed the experience of the Lord: *Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me*.²

These prophetic words were quoted to Jesus' disciples by the Lord in the upper room on the night that they were being fulfilled.³ What sorrow and hurt He must have felt!

'Betrayed' is the title of a book written by Stan Telchin.⁴ It describes Stan's experience when his daughter phoned him one day to say that she had accepted Jesus as her Messiah and had become a Christian. He felt betrayed! How could his daughter, whom he loved, do such a thing? Stan was Jewish.

He resolutely set out to prove her mistaken and misguided. Being a methodical man, he collected his resource material and began reading the New Testament for himself. He planned to find 'ammunition' to convince his daughter that she was wrong and to persuade her to return to the Jewish faith. Love for her, and a desire to rescue her from the 'clutches' of Christianity, spurred him on.

As Stan began to read the New Testament accounts of Jesus' life and ministry, and to compare them with the Old Testament prophecies concerning the coming Messiah, Stan began a journey into faith. He describes in his book his initial deep hurt and sense of betrayal and then his final joy at his own discovery and acceptance of Jesus as Messiah and personal Saviour and Lord.

The final chapter of Jesus' sojourn on earth as a man of sorrows began that fateful night when Judas appeared with a band of armed officers to arrest Jesus at the Garden of Gethsemane. Matthew records the depth of Judas' treachery: *Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "The one I kiss is the man; seize him." And he came up to Jesus at once and said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" And he kissed him. Jesus said to him, "Friend, do what you came to do."*⁵

There was a deep wound inflicted that night, deeper than any Roman nail or spear: betrayed with a kiss by one whom Jesus called "friend". Jesus had selected Judas to be one of His twelve divinely chosen men who would



follow Him, learn from Him, be sent out by Him with special powers to heal and cast out evil spirits⁶ and to be His witnesses. Judas had a privileged place in Jesus' inner circle. Luke, in his account of the choosing of the Twelve after Jesus had spent the night in prayer, ends his list with the words, *and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor*.⁷ While the other disciples were learning to become fishers of men, Judas was learning treachery.

John, in his gospel account, gives us a further insight into the character of Judas. Mary of Bethany had used expensive ointment to anoint Jesus in an act of loving devotion, and Judas criticised her actions, saying that the ointment could have been sold and the money given to the poor. John writes: *He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it*.⁸

This love of money showed a flaw in Judas' character that motivated him to go to the high priests and agree to betray Jesus for thirty pieces of silver.

It is also recorded by John concerning Judas, that during the meal in the upper room, *Satan entered into him*.⁹ Treachery, betrayal, greed and Satan – they form an evil quartet.

The kind and manner of betrayal Jesus experienced was unique to Him. Christians have sometimes experienced betrayal by someone they trusted, and found it to be a very bitter experience. Sometimes, sadly, it is a fellow Christian who lets us down in a time of need, and it can be a struggle to pray for those whom we feel have hurt us and to be willing to forgive them. If that is your experience just now, then there is One who can sympathise with you, and who ever lives to help you and to intercede for you, for He is a Great High Priest.¹⁰

References: (1) Is. 53:3 (2) Ps. 41:9 (3) John 13:18 (4) Stan Telchin, *Betrayed*, Marshalls, 1981 (5) Mat. 26:48-50 (6) Mat. 10:1,8 (7) Luke 6:16 (8) John 12:6 (9) John 13:27 (10) Heb. 7:25-26

Bible quotations are from the ESV

The full Gospel

Called

Geoff Hydon, Mount Forest, Canada

What is the difference between a dog and a cat as a pet? Well, usually the dog comes when you call it, but the cat only comes if it thinks you are going to feed it: annoying! It is hard for us to enter into God's feelings, knowing He could call, but there would be no response because people are too focused on their selfish pursuits. Yet God calls us by His Word, which the Spirit of God uses, whether in its written form or in the preaching, to accomplish the aim of the call.¹ In our text (Rom. 8:30), it says: *...these whom He predestined, **He also called**; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.* These terms could well be applied uniquely to the Messiah, but here they are amazingly focused on Christian believers. Here, 'to call' means to summon, not to 'name' – although elsewhere 'to call' does mean that.² So God does indeed call, or summon, people and this Scripture is dealing with those who do respond, to the delight of God. Theologians describe this as an effectual call, a call that achieves its purpose. We know that is the case here because the next phrase says the same people who are called are also justified, and God does not simply justify everyone,³ so the 'called' here are only those who respond positively. But, we must ask, why do they?

Responding to the Gospel call

In the oversimplified dog/cat illustration we contrasted obedience with self-will. It is important to see that obedience in responding to God's call is just as much an act of our will as disobedience is. God may expect 'subjection' and 'submission' as well as 'obedience'. Subjection first involves us in knowing our place;⁴ we recognize we are subject to God's will, which is true whether we like it or not. Submission is a lovely description, implying that someone already realizes they are subject, and therefore yields their will:⁵ it is a positive attitude of mind. Obedience is the means by which we voluntarily show our submission to God, not turning a deaf ear to His word but putting it into effect in the thing



He has subjected us to.⁶ Some regrettably and wrongly picture obedience to God more like our cat analogy: you can force a cat to come to you when you call, because it is subject to your power. You will not get any voluntary submission of course, and you will know from its claws that forced compliance is not the same as obedience!

God continues to call people through the gospel,⁷ from darkness to light, from sinfulness to sanctification, from burdens to rest, from doom to glory. God calls not only to salvation from hell,⁸ but to the knowledge of the truth;⁹ the gospel is the medium of God's continuous call to the sinner and to the saint; so extensive! Our text is almost a précis of Ephesians 2:1-10. The glorious gospel message is directed to the many and effectively reaches each one for whom it is intended.¹⁰ It would be impossible anyway to confine the preaching of the gospel to just those whom God has chosen, so the message goes to all. By God's foreknowledge and predestination¹¹ only His chosen will respond and only their sins will be atoned for,¹² though the value of Christ's sacrifice is sufficient for all.¹³ He indeed first chooses those who will be called, even though it is also absolutely true that they are saved because they respond in faith to the gospel message (and if some are unsaved it also reflects their own decision, for which they are fully accountable, and cannot blame God that they did not receive His call).¹⁴

So are any forced to accept the call? No! If you are saved you may have already come to realize how it happened. In probably the most selfless act of your entire life, you fell into line with God's benevolent will and placed faith in the saviour He has provided. It was an act of pure obedience. He called; you responded. You were subject to your position as a sinner meriting the judgment of God. Changing your mind from your previous unbelief of whatever degree, you submitted wholeheartedly to the Lordship of Christ and decided to follow Him as a disciple. In your obedience, you could fulfil the Scripture

about believing in your heart that God had raised Him from the dead and confessing with your mouth that Jesus is Lord.¹⁵ You didn't make Him Lord by responding to God's call, for He is Lord and Christ whether people wish to accept that reality or not.¹⁶ But you personally put His Lordship into effect in your life, by acting in faith that He is who the Bible says He is. You became obedient from the heart.¹⁷ And so you could begin to learn that His calling enables you to walk with Him in ongoing obedience to the gospel. Where does that path lead? How can we keep on track?

The Spirit's work

The context of Romans 8 is firstly about the Spirit of God. He it is who communicates with our human spirit to enable us to hear God's call and appropriate God's salvation, and He witnesses to that reality.¹⁸ It is as though He gives us a hearing aid, so that the missed message of the gospel can be heard distinctly; but more than hearing is involved as the Spirit brings necessary conviction of the truth.¹⁹ So those who reject the gospel message are not merely rejecting theoretical propositions, but rejecting the operation of the Holy Spirit.²⁰ The Spirit's work continues in those called, to conform them to Christ, for we have been predestined to this.²¹ That of course looks forward to an ultimate completion, but may profitably be considered also as a work in progress,²² enabled by the Spirit of God. There is a purpose for the called ones. Romans 8:28, in the same context as our text, says: *God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.* Of course our love for God is in response to the call, not the cause of it. Love for Him, Spirit-produced,²³ will delight the heart of God.²⁴ And that love may need to be expressed in a positive reaction to all kinds of external opposition, if that is the path the purpose of God determines for our good. But our chapter goes on to reveal our strengthening by Christ's intercession and our absolute assurance of victory as effectually called ones, because we cannot be separated from the love of God, in Christ Jesus.

A call to a walk

He has a purpose even now in His call, and it is to govern our walk, that is our direction and preoccupation in life.²⁵ Have we sought to discover that purpose, and to pursue it?²⁶ 'Seeing-eye' guide dogs hopefully know their master's purpose and direction, and don't go off chasing other distracting things. Are we content to follow our Master's directions in response to His call? Of course, we are not leading a blind master, we are following an all-seeing Master and Lord, whose purpose is to bring about what is good for us; and we need good spiritual eyesight for this.²⁷ Where do we see Him leading? God calls those He has sanctified into the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord,²⁸ a fellowship (community) that is the precious property of the risen Lord. Not every believer appreciates the reality of this amazing truth. This term is used in the context of people serving in a church of God, comprised of those who are 'saints by calling', a literal

reading of 1 Corinthians 1:2. Not just titled 'saints', named that way, but having received an irrevocable²⁹ call from God to be saints. What then should a called saint be doing? Living out their call in a church of God, which is no doubt why such churches are also called churches of the saints.³⁰ But note that it says that such people have already been sanctified in Christ Jesus; God's call to sainthood is effectual. But those who are saints are to be saints, obediently responding to the Lord's imperative call to come to Him,³¹ and making their 'calling and election sure'.^{32,33}

References: (1) John 16:8; Rom. 10:8,14-17 (2) e.g. John 1:42 (3) Ex. 23:7 (4) See for instance 1 Cor. 11:3-10; 15:27 (5) Heb. 13:17 (6) e.g. Heb. 5:9; 11:8 (7) 2 Thes. 2:13-14; Is. 45:22; Mark 16:15-16; 1 Cor. 1:23-24; 2 Tim. 1:9; Heb. 9:15; 1 Pet. 2:9 (8) Rom. 9:22-24 (9) 1 Tim. 2:4 (10) Mat. 22:14 though the primary application is future (11) For further reading see the paper on predestination in the January 2013 issue of NT (12) Rom. 3:22-26 (13) 1 Tim. 2:6 (14) Rom. 9:18-21; John 5:40; 1 Cor. 1:23-24 (15) Rom. 10:9 (16) Acts 2:36 (17) Rom. 6:16-18 (18) Rom. 8:16 (19) John 16:8-15 (20) Acts 7:51; Mark 3:28-29 (21) Rom. 8:29 (22) See for instance Eph. 4:13-17, the last verse focusing on a changed walk (23) Gal. 5:22 (24) Hos. 6:6 (25) 1 Thes. 2:12 (26) 2 Pet. 1:10; Phil. 2:12-13 (27) 2 Pet. 1:3-9 (28) 1 Cor. 1:9 ESV (29) Rom. 11:29 Note: the gifts are plural but the call is singular and all-encompassing (30) 1 Cor. 14:33 Note: "church" translates a Greek word meaning "called out" (31) Mat. 11:28 (32) 2 Pet. 1:10 NKJV (33) For a more in-depth treatment of this overall subject, see NT Series 2009 'The Call of Christ'

All references from NASB unless otherwise stated



The full Gospel

Bridging the emotional moat

Tony Jones, Aberkenfig, Wales

This series of articles makes the analogy of winning someone's heart for Christ with the methods used to enter a fortified castle. The first line of defence was the moat. This separated the walls of the castle from unfriendly forces and a bridge was necessary to cross it. For a welcome guest, the drawbridge would be lowered by those who were in the castle; whilst those who were on the offensive would try to fill in the moat or build their own bridge.

What causes emotional defences?

In our analogy, the moat that surrounds a person is that individual's emotional defences. These defences are ways to keep people at arm's length until trust replaces initial doubts and suspicions. The moat will consist of personal experiences that have shaped someone's outlook and his willingness to build friendships with new contacts. In our world, many have experienced significant hurt caused by others as the selfish character of the last days grows.¹ Deeper relationships are so easily cast aside today. So many parents neglect their responsibilities to their children, some of whose lives are terminated before they even get their first breath; divorce courts register increasingly the headlong race to annul vows that seemingly were not taken for lifelong fulfilment, and who knows how many broken hearts are created as people flit in and out of temporarily convenient 'living together' arrangements? What, but the love of God, can truly heal these terrible scars? Who is there to show it, if not us?

How do we cross the moat?

However, the analogy of us crossing someone's moat could be misleading. A drawbridge is not lowered when the enemy is advancing aggressively. As Christians, though, given Christ's love for the unsaved, we need to be ready to establish long-term relationships. This has to be based on a trust as close as possible to the absolute trust that they would be able to have in the Lord if He were physically alongside. We need to start to build a bridge, a strong bridge based on the Spirit's fruit² which gives the person confidence in our character and motive. 'Success' would be evident when they let down their drawbridge to close the remaining gap and metaphorically welcome us. We will be presented with numerous occasions to exhibit wisdom requested from God in the quest to reach those we know for Him³ and we have to be faithful in our witness.⁴ We may not even become aware of a person's salvation in this life. God has His plans and uses us as He wills. We need to fulfil obediently the role He has for us by building those connections, using our experiences too.⁵ Bill Hybels says: 'I believe many people begin their spiritual quest at a negative ten and that it is my role to



facilitate their movement to a negative eight. That's it. Two points on the spectrum, and a result that is still in negative territory'.⁶ Our part is to lay a foundation that can be built upon by the God who crowns work with His blessing;⁷ this includes challenges for us which, without God's Spirit, would be futile⁸ – accurately representing the person of Christ to them, introducing them to the lover of their souls and loving them with His love. Of course, we will not be perfect ambassadors, so the assistance of the Spirit is crucial – awareness of weaknesses, confession of failure and a devotion not to let the Master down. One bad example of a disciple's behaviour could extinguish any desire by a seeker.

People

We are surrounded by the people God has determined to be there, for His purposes. These are our immediate contacts⁹ so we don't have to go looking for people to reach out to. What is needed, though, is to thoughtfully consider whom we interact with, the types of relationships we have, and their needs that we know of. We can then bring all this to the Lord, asking Him to lead us to have a burden for specific people and look for developing relationships for His glory. That might not be the ones we

think are most obvious, so don't rule people in or out based on personal feelings, though common interests will assist. There is a variety of groups with whom we spend time, which will differ depending on our stage in life, health, mobility, etc.

Neighbours

This is a tougher arena to work in than it used to be. The trend today seems to be towards being more insulated from neighbours, not necessarily by choice, but perhaps as the result of the frenetic society we live in. The pressure of work in the Western world means that opportunities for a 'chat over the garden fence' are more limited. Many people choose to interact with others by electronic media while being entertained by the TV after a hard day's work. Generating communication with neighbours requires conscious effort, and those things which work against God, including our selfish self,¹⁰ would feed us all sorts of excuses to avoid that endeavour. Making contact could take place soon after moving into a new property by distributing a brief, attractive letter/note about yourself/family including a reference to your relationship with the Lord and church membership. This could be followed by some invitations into your home for coffee or a meal. If new people move into the locality, make a brief visit with a small welcome gift and a word of introduction. There are often invitations to neighbourhood group events to respond to and with prayer, wise involvement can lead to widening opportunities to build bridges. The number of ways to reach out is large, but it is all too easy to generate plausible excuses not to do so – even things like, "I just have too much to do in church to do that as well."

Work colleagues / fellow students

We must not forget the primary reason for being in these groups – to learn or to work. This is itself a great opportunity to build trust by being someone who is a model student/employee; doing the work efficiently without complaint, not slacking when the boss is not looking, etc. In the Bible, Joseph excelled in this and Paul exhorts us to continue to do so.¹¹ An attitude of humility developed by the Spirit of God is essential, to prevent getting people's backs up.¹² Pray for, and seek out, positive conversations which do not disturb duty. Socialising opportunities arise when bridges can be strengthened. The locations are often 'neutral/tending to unhelpful,' which brings the risk of destroying work already done. Engaging in such events ought to take place only after specific prayer asking for the Holy Spirit's help to keep holy and focused on the task of crossing the moat with people, not indulging in self-satisfying pursuits.¹³

Family and friends

This can be a tough group to build the bridges that lead to evangelism as you will be best known here, warts and all. The advantage is that the drawbridge is perhaps more easily lowered. 21st century communication is often electronic, so careful use of this is paramount. The written word loses intonation and so is easily misinterpreted; use

of social media networks is tending to allow people to reveal issues that they might not talk about. This can be insightful, but it's all too easy for a Christian to undo good groundwork with unwise text. Poor venue choices to meet with friends could also easily undermine the foundations of any bridge.

Places

Before most people had cars, it was usual to live, work and go to church meetings and activities in the same locality; clearly an advantage in building bridges to people with the same groups involved in all three. We should consider this a higher priority in our prayers when making significant decisions. Today mobility is easy, so our work, our church's meeting location, and where we live, can be some (considerable) distances from each other. Circumstances may seem to dictate how these work out, but selfish factors are easily applied, yet not easily recognised, in decision-making. "How can I get a better property for the same money?" "How can I get a better job than those which are local to where the church meets?" etc. Distant locations mean it's that much harder to invite work colleagues/neighbours with whom we are bridge-building to appropriate events taking place in the church's meeting place. We may not even consider asking people along as it is "just too far" to expect them to come. How much of an impact over the recent years has this had on our opportunity to move past building the bridge?

References (1) 2 Tim. 3:2-5 (2) Gal. 5:22-23; 2 Pet. 1:5-7 (3) Jas. 1:5; Prov. 11:30 (4) 1 Cor. 4:2 (5) 2 Cor. 1:3-4 (6) Bill Hybels, *Just Walk Across the Room*, Zondervan, 2006 (7) 1 Cor. 3:6 (8) Gal. 3:3 (9) Acts 17:26 (10) Rom. 7:18 (11) Gen. 39:3-4,21-23; Col. 3:22-23 (12) Phil. 2:3 (13) Rom. 15:1-3



One-anothering

Forgiving one another

Stephen McCabe, Belfast, N.Ireland

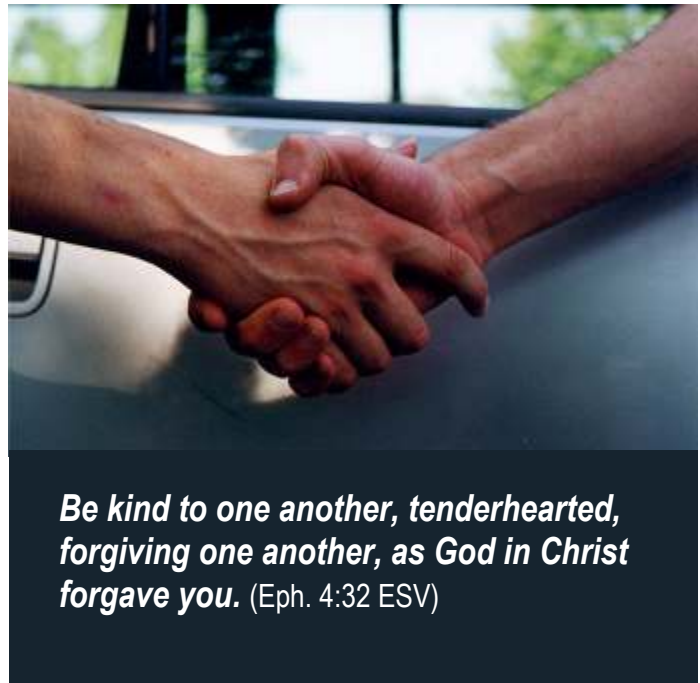
Have you ever been really hurt by someone? So **painfully** hurt that you find it difficult to forgive them? Many people in the world today are probably of the opinion that in that situation you **don't** forgive the person who hurt you, but simply try to forget about it and move on with your life. As disciples of the Lord Jesus, however, we **cannot** take such an approach – especially when the one needing forgiveness is one with whom we serve. This was Paul's concern in the highlighted verse to the right, written to people serving together as a church.

Not only do we find it difficult to forgive, as human beings, but we can also find it difficult to **accept** forgiveness. Why? Perhaps we are sometimes too proud to admit we have done wrong in the first place. Perhaps it is because we all have a sense that **our wrongs need to be paid for**. We feel the need for justice to be done, even when we are on the receiving end.

Forgiveness can be a painful thing, both for the person forgiving, and the one who needs to be forgiven – the reason for the lasting pain is that when we hurt someone, or are hurt **by** someone else, it is **not reversible**. We can't turn back time. We can't flip a switch and make it go away. The damage is done, and needs to be dealt with in some way before we can genuinely move on with that person.

And that's really as far as we can go as human beings. But, in Ephesians 4:32, Paul inspires us to look **beyond** the human, to the divine. We are asked not just to forgive one another, but to forgive one another *as God in Christ forgave you*. When we begin to understand that, we begin to understand what forgiveness really is.

The Greek word rendered 'forgive' in the verse is *charizomai*. It is usually translated, simply, as 'give'. But it is translated as 'forgive' when in the context of incurring debt (whether monetary, offence given to



Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. (Eph. 4:32 ESV)

someone, or transgression against God). The idea is of the one to whom the debt is owed 'giving' a cancellation of the debt to the offender – and the result is **forgiveness**.

The Lord Jesus talked about forgiveness in the context of debt too. He illustrates what real forgiveness is all about in Matthew 18:21-35. It is the story of a servant who owed his master more money than he could possibly repay. The master originally threatened to sell the servant's family and possessions to get some return for the debt, but when the servant begged for mercy, the master forgave the debt completely. Notice, though, that there is something in the story that is not explicitly stated. The master gave the cancellation of the debt. The point I am making is that when the master forgave the servant's debt, **the debt did not simply disappear**. The master himself **absorbed** the debt – the cost of it fell on him! There we see grace. Similarly, when a person forgives, they act in grace, accepting the full brunt of the hurt or injustice that has been caused to them, rather than returning it on the one who caused it.

And that is what happened when Jesus died. We are forgiven, as saved disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. But our debt **did not simply disappear**. God's forgiveness of us, in Christ, is built on the fact that He bore the cost of it Himself. At Calvary, the Lord Jesus accepted the loss on our behalf – justice has been done.

It is so important that we forgive one another (**really** forgive, graciously bearing the hurt as God has done for us, in Christ) when repentance is evident.¹ If we can't or don't forgive in the true sense, then bitterness inevitably creeps into our lives, causing untold trouble – and also having an impact on those with whom we serve.² That's something we should be striving to avoid. Rather, as we delight in our own unmerited forgiveness from God, we should become tenderhearted. That tenderheartedness should lead to forgiving one another – **as God in Christ has forgiven us**.

References: (1) see Luke 17:3 (2) see Heb. 12:14-15

Letter writing

The beginning and the end

Martin Jones, Toronto, Canada

‘Irenaeus – to Apollinarius, his dearest brother, many greetings. I pray continually for your health, and I myself am well. I wish you to know that I reached land on the sixth of the month of Epeiph and we unloaded our cargo on the eighteenth of the same month. I went up to Rome, on the twenty-fifth of the same month and the place welcomed us as the god willed, and we are daily expecting our discharge, it so being that up till today nobody in the corn fleet has been released. Many salutations to your wife. And to Serenus and to all who love you, each by name. Goodbye.’¹

Modern Western culture usually notes the letter writer at the very end, but ancient Graeco-Roman letters, like the one above and in most of Paul’s letters, bore closer resemblance to an email – both the ‘to’ and the ‘from’ were at the very start! There was an important reason: Paul was very keen, like the ancient philosophers, to establish his credentials up front so that his message would be taken seriously – especially when some difficult things needed to be said (such as to the Galatian or the Corinthian churches); but he never mentioned minor details such as his birthplace or parentage. The focus was how he was appointed and sent by God as an apostle and as His servant.

The ‘to’ section is also meaningful. Rather than flatter the recipients with the usual grandiose titles (most venerable and honourable, etc.), Paul often highlighted something about the status of the readers in relation to God and Christ (see Romans). Describing the recipients as fellow-saints, or brothers and sisters, also struck an egalitarian tone, quite distinct from the master/disciple relationship of the philosopher.

Ancient letters typically opened with some kind of greeting or salutation; usually more extensive and varied than the ‘Dear’ that has become routine for us. ‘*Chaire*’, a Greek word meaning ‘hail’, was commonly used (occurring five times in the New Testament²). Paul cleverly substituted ‘*charis*’ instead, the Greek word for ‘grace’. Ingeniously, he also often combined it with the Jewish greeting of ‘peace’ (‘*shalom*’) to create a distinctively Christian opening which would immediately appeal to the varied congregations to which he was often writing.

Paul also followed convention by typically giving thanks to God (but not ‘the gods’) for some attribute or action of the recipient and/or making a prayer request on their behalf (for their spiritual, not physical, welfare – unlike 3 John). This was not just a ritual and he often went far beyond a brief statement – except in Galatians where he was clearly too aggrieved and jumped straight to the issues at hand. See 1 Corinthians where he gives thanks



for the grace that has been given them, and also look for times where the cause for thanksgiving hints at the content of the main body of the letter.

The closing of a letter also had a number of conventions. It provided an opportunity for greetings to those known to the writer (especially extensive in Romans) and the sharing of future plans – for Paul this usually involved detail of his missionary journeys (see 1 Corinthians again). There was usually space for news about common friends (e.g. Colossians) and the sharing of a homily or maxim (see Romans 12:9-13). It also wasn’t uncommon for Paul to alter the typical Graeco-Roman entreaty to be favoured by compliance with some sort of request and turn it into a benediction for the recipients to be favoured by God (with peace) and by Jesus (with grace). Finally, there was often a closing doxology (see Romans for an example). It’s perhaps at the close that we get the most personal glimpse of Paul and his very real relationships with the people he was writing to. We shouldn’t lose sight of this situational context when we delve into the deep theological content and the various clever literary devices that Paul used in his letters – as we will do in our final two articles in this series.

References: (1) Soards, Marion, L., *The Apostle Paul: An Introduction to his Writings and Teaching*, Paulist Press, 1987 (2) Mat. 26:49; 27:29; Mark 15:18; Luke 1:28; John 19:3

Bread of life

The grain offering

Martin Archibald, Paisley, Scotland

When Hannah was ready to make the journey to Shiloh to present her little boy to the Lord, a three-year-old bull was chosen and kept from any hurt, while she prepared an ephah (about 22 litres) of the finest flour and a skin of wine.¹ The generous quantities may have been meant as food for a growing boy, or more probably as an offering to the Lord. Perhaps the flour in question was for a grain offering accompanying a burnt offering, or associated with a Nazirite vow.² For this was the day of dedication of a life to the Lord; and the flour signified to God the life of someone even more precious – the coming Messiah.

We are without any New Testament mention to guide us in interpretation of the grain offering of Leviticus, so the comments we make now are suggestive and will hopefully prompt further study and contemplation. The absence of blood, however, has suggested to many that it was not the death of the Christ foreshadowed here, but His lovely life, in which He showed us how to live. As Hannah, with total faith, entrusted her longed-for son to God, despite the disgraceful conduct of the priests at Shiloh, the Son of God would live in perfectness amid the failings of His people and the pressure of subjection to Rome.

Finest flour

So the flour for the grain offering was milled patiently between the grind-stones till its fine quality displayed the

'Now when anyone presents a grain offering as an offering to the LORD, his offering shall be of fine flour, and he shall pour oil on it and put frankincense on it. He shall then bring it to Aaron's sons the priests; and shall take from it his handful of its fine flour and of its oil with all of its frankincense. And the priest shall offer it up in smoke as its memorial portion on the altar, an offering by fire of a soothing aroma to the LORD. The remainder of the grain offering belongs to Aaron and his sons: a thing most holy, of the offerings to the LORD by fire.' (Lev. 2:1-3 NASB)

balanced temper of the Christ to come. In every moral choice, His entire direction was towards the good. He would govern Himself in the true spirit of the Law, so as to deal with others in love and grace, whatever provocation He met. Perhaps the best way to know what Christlike grace can do to our words is to go through a day with the resolve to halt what we are about to say, and rephrase it as we think Christ would do. How often would it be best to keep quiet! But there is a need in our troubled world for words of grace and truth, such as John heard and treasured.³ They shaped the way he would write in the letters of his mature years – so much farther on than calling down fire to destroy!⁴

The essential point was that here was the Son of God in a body like that of other men. When He sat tired by a well, He would still pour out the living water of His pure thoughts to fill the emptiness of the woman who came there.⁵ He spoke of worship – and perhaps she wondered at this man thinking that God would value the worship of a woman like her! Then she felt the fullness and glory of worship indeed, taking her proper place before almighty God. He was the only man who had ever brought her near to God! And while the travellers returning with bread showed their disapproval, He smiled on her still.⁶

Oil and frankincense

The grain offering brought to the priest was to have olive oil and frankincense, so that the priest could take them up with flour in one hand and place a sample on the altar – all for God.

The oil is a rich picture of the Holy Spirit. Oil was an important part of Israel's food, and today the Spirit takes of the things of Jesus to build us up.⁷ He is the Spirit of grace – like the healing, nourishing action of natural oil on skin – even on open wounds. Perhaps you have not yet opened up a hidden sore to His gracious work, through absorbing the living Word from the divine Counsellor. He does not leave the believer, even though we may grieve Him.⁸ Then, the Spirit is also a teacher, shedding the light of spiritual truth; as oil fuelled the lamps in the disciples' homes.⁹ He cleanses from impurities, as oil was used to wash out the grit of daily life in a hot country; for He is the Spirit of holiness.

Rising from all was the fragrance of frankincense in its purest form. It was precious because it was brought from afar, carefully collected from the bark of the tree, and expresses devotion of heart.

None but God received this part of the offering, so we humbly consider the joy that the Father found in the Son who did all His will, transcending all that shall ever be offered from sinners saved by grace. More than once God



opened the heavens to speak of how *well pleased* He was with His Son.¹⁰ In anticipation He set the star in the skies to draw men of wisdom to where they could kneel to give His Son frankincense when He entered the world. One day the nations shall honour Christ the King with incense and pure offerings in every place,¹¹ while His first people look in wonder on *the one they have pierced*.¹²

The salt of the covenant

*Do not leave the salt of the covenant of your God out of your grain offerings: add salt to all your offerings.*¹³ Thus the importance of salt was stressed. Salt preserved, preventing decay; and it enhanced flavour. It didn't come cheaply, and was later used as part of the Roman soldier's pay. So there was a practical provision here in the Law for the priests to eat their portion of the offerings with the benefits of salt. That points to the spiritual message: that life is properly maintained and blessed by keeping covenant with God. But we must go back to the foundation. Only the Christ who kept the Old Covenant in its fullness was able to offer Himself a perfect sacrifice for our sins, so that we might enter on the New Covenant cleansed by His blood. To remember that week by week, and to offer ourselves day by day to God in return for His mercy, is our *reasonable service*.¹⁴ The Lord Himself is our example, for His words lasted in their power with those who listened and obeyed; and His service to others made life worth living.

Baked with fire

Most forms of the grain offering were baked with fire by griddle, oven or pan. We leave the reader to consider the points of difference, and focus here on the fire. There can be no doubt that this fire represents the suffering that was a defining part of the Lord's life on earth. Whether the pain was physical, mental, emotional or spiritual, our Saviour bore all forms of ill we know to this day. We love him as the *man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering*,¹⁵ and we have the more confidence when we reach up to Him at the throne of grace, where He is ready to serve us in every time of need.¹⁶ Whatever the burden we bear, we are often surprised to find that He is already on site, walking with us through the pain; or speaking to the loved one who has suffered a blow, by the time we phone or visit. One widow found Him with her in the valley, as He halted the bier on which her dead son lay.¹⁷ Another's

giving, despite all her need, came under His loving attention – and what blessing surely followed that act of devotion to God!¹⁸ When His mother and John were beginning to think past His death, He arranged for her care in the midst of His agony.¹⁹ When Mary stood before the empty tomb in sorrow and fear, He came to stand where she could hear and see Him.²⁰ When His disciples had toiled all night with nothing to show for it, He was there on the shore with breakfast ready and words of grace and truth.²¹ As for temptation –

‘Touched with a sympathy within,
He knows our feeble frame:
He knows what sore temptations are,
For He has felt the same.’²²

Acute loss, especially when unexpected, leaves us numb for a while, perhaps unable to pray. So we are told that at times like these the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings greater than ours.²³ Later comes the capacity to help others in their pain with more understanding.²⁴ It is *the fellowship of His sufferings*,²⁵ that Paul prized so highly, finding the need for it on every hand, whether in the rigours of shipwreck, or the stress of working with perverse characters in Ephesus, for three years, *night and day with tears*.²⁶

Yet from these trials our Saviour ministers to us the bread of life (He sustains us), if we look for His leading and learn from Him. It moved Paul to write about *the life that is truly life*,²⁷ the abundant life of which the Lord spoke:²⁸ how to lift up the weary by strengthening words and being present in their pain.

No yeast or honey in a grain offering made by fire

Yeast and honey here suggest what makes bread or cake enjoyable to the appetite. But our Lord had *no beauty or majesty to attract us to him*,²⁹ and the food for the priests was for their needs, not for indulgence. Those who follow Christ will find they can no longer please themselves. That handful that was placed on the altar was *an offering made by fire*, the sign of total dedication. The rest was still *a most holy part*. It belonged to Aaron and his sons.³⁰

Thus believers are called to priesthood today with the reward of a deeper appreciation of the character of Christ who is *the bread of life*.³¹

References: (1) 1 Sam. 1:24 (2) 1 Sam. 1:11 ff; Num. 6:14-15 (3) John 1:14 (4) Luke 9:54 (5) John 4:5-26 (6) John 4:27 (7) John 16:14 (8) John 14:16 (9) John 16:13-15 (10) Mat. 3:17; 17:5; John 12:28 (11) Mal. 1:11 (12) Zech. 12:10 (13) Lev. 2:13 (14) Rom. 12:1 NKJV (15) Is. 53:3 (16) Heb.4:15-16 (17) Luke 7:11-17 (18) Luke 21:1-4 (19) John 19:26-27 (20) John 20:10-18 (21) John 21:4-9 (22) I. Watts, PHSS 223 (23) Rom. 8:26 (24) 2 Cor. 1:3-4 (25) Phil. 3:10 NASB (26) Acts 20:19,31 (27) 1 Tim. 6:19 (28) John 10:10 (29) Is. 53:2 (30) Lev. 2:9-10 (31) 1 Pet. 2:5; John 6:35

Bible quotations from NIV unless stated otherwise

A tangible closeness

An interview with Ros Hickling, Cromer, England

We are very appreciative that Ros Hickling has been willing to speak of her tragic loss of her young husband, Duncan. Duncan was called home over three years ago, at age 42.

Could you outline something of your general family circumstances prior to Duncan's homecall?

We were a close-knit family of four living in a small thatched cottage in a quiet village in North Norfolk. We were happy and apparently healthy and belonged to our local Church of God in Cromer.

We had little in terms of material wealth, and financial struggle seemed to be a regular companion. However, we were blessed with a sense of contentment and an understanding of who God is and of His divine dealings in the lives of individuals. It was with this strong Christian belief that my husband and I together brought up our two children.

However on a fairly bright Saturday morning in September 2009 my life and the lives of our children would change forever. It was the day on which my nephew had arranged his 'stag do' and my husband (Duncan) travelled over to Warwickshire to attend the event.

Later that day, my daughter and I were returning home from shopping and we could hear the telephone ringing in the house. It was my brother who gave me the news that my husband had been rushed to hospital and the situation was very serious. I telephoned the Warwickshire hospital and was told to get there as quickly as possible.

On our arrival we were given the worst news possible. My young husband, who I thought was invincible had suffered a fatal heart attack and had been suddenly taken from this world and ushered into his eternal home with the Lord.

How would you describe your experience of God's help and presence when the reality began to sink in that the Lord had taken Duncan?

It is difficult to describe what I felt on receiving that devastating news. My first reaction was to protect my children who were with me and I put my arms around them both and held them close. I then wanted, more than anything to see my husband and the nurse took me (and my sister who accompanied me) into the room where he lay. Through my shock and heartache there remained a degree of rationale and on looking at my husband's face I could see without any doubt that his soul and the very essence of him was gone. The knowledge and sight of that fact had a profound impact on me, because I could see that the person that I knew and loved was gone from that body and I also knew without doubt that his soul was now



with the Lord. It was, of course, the face that I loved and I gently held his hand and with tears said my goodbye.

Well, the days, weeks and months that followed were heavy and hard to bear as we slowly came to terms with our inconceivable loss – my husband, the children's father, our family and spiritual head and my 'beloved Dunc'. The enormity of what had happened sometimes dawned upon me afresh and I was overwhelmed with sorrow.

Although the tears flowed and my heart was broken, there was not any time when I felt actual despair. I knew that the same God who held Duncan also held me and I would go through this trauma with God's help. Letters arrived daily by the dozen from people in the fellowship of churches of God from around the world, assuring us of prayer support and giving scriptures to comfort. I recall that reading the Scriptures was like balm to my soul and there were times when I know that it was only the Lord who understood the depth of my sorrow. I drew close to Him and I knew a real sense of complete and indescribable peace. When I felt at my lowest ebb, I knew that if I prayed then the Lord would lift me up, as He did on countless occasions. It was this experience which sustained me and I felt the Lord's presence so strongly, with His sustaining grace and leading. It was for me a new and deeper experience of God with an almost tangible closeness which gave me an amazing strength and hope.

In what way would you say that you've developed a greater sense of God and increased faith as you pass through the bereavement process and into changed circumstances?

I believe that the Lord has blessed me with a deep faith in Him and although my husband was far too young to die in our earthly understanding of things, I know that it was no mere accident and that it was part of God's plan which, although hard to accept or understand, we must submit to the will of the One who is above all things and before all things. (Col. 1:15-20)

Naturally we wonder why God chose to take Duncan at a young age, but if we really have any grasp of who God is, then, although we sorrow, we would never challenge His purposes and we must graciously submit to His will.

I am no different from any other person and I have very many failings as a Christian, but I do know that His grace is sufficient for me and that His power is made perfect in weakness. (2 Cor. 12:9)

Well, that was over three years ago now and life has continued and I have had to adjust to my new status of 'widow'.

The Lord has continued to lead us and bless us in many ways and He has provided abundantly for all of our needs. I have the peace that passes all understanding and I am

content. I know that the Lord will continue to lead me in my life and I look to Him to guide me and my children in the future. Great is His faithfulness.

Luther once wrote in one of his letters to Erasmus, "your thoughts of God are too human" and we are all guilty of that; of never really appreciating the supremacy of Christ. When we can grasp that God is greater than all our reasoning, then I believe we will find it much easier to accept His will. I hope, therefore, that this brief account of my experience invokes in you some desire to increase your appreciation of God, of who He is and of the attributes of His character. He is literally awesome and we should revere Him, give thanks to Him for His grace, mercy and love to us and trust Him without doubting.

Christ in Isaiah

The Identified Servant

Edwin Stanley, Aberkenfig, Wales

"The Lord called me from the womb, from the body of my mother he named my name.

He made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand he hid me;

he made me a polished arrow; in his quiver he hid me away.

And he said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified." ...

And now the Lord says, he who formed me from the womb to be his servant,

to bring Jacob back to him; and that Israel might be gathered to him – ...

"... I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."¹

In this passage, the Holy Spirit identifies for us the One who is to be revealed as the Servant of the Lord. He does it by directing us to the effect He will have as He enters into this world. He would be a light for all nations and would convey salvation to all the world.

Starting at that point of revelation, we are immediately taken to John 1 where the Lord Jesus is seen both as the life and the light of men.² Furthermore, John shows us that the One who is thus revealed is from eternity. The womb was not the beginning of the One who would be seen as the Servant, but it was the way that God was to take, in order to enter into humanity. Galatians 4 confirms the glorious truth that God the Son was sent via a woman in order that He might become God's servant and our saviour, as He took up a body of flesh and blood.³

Here, then, is a clear identifying mark: the Servant would be called and named from the womb.⁴ Moreover, He is seen to be the product of the Father's giving, the Spirit's overshadowing power and the Son's overwhelming



willingness to become the obedient Servant, *taking the form of a servant ... the likeness of men.*⁵

The Servant's mouth would be like a sharp sword; *"The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life";⁶ "You have the words of eternal life ...";⁷ When they heard these words, some of the people said, "This really is the Prophet."⁸ These are some of the examples of how Jesus' words touched and changed those who responded to Him, as He is identified by His speech, for *"I have given them the words that you gave me."*⁹*

Isaiah goes on to speak of people outside of Israel who were to benefit from this revelation of God. Matthew 4:12-17 clearly shows that both Israel and the Gentiles of Galilee would see this great light; whilst Simeon, speaking of the child in his arms, sees Him as being *"... prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel."*¹⁰ It becomes even more apparent that God's salvation in this One has come to all the world as Paul speaks to those in Antioch in Pisidia¹¹ where he turns from Israel and takes the message of life to the Gentiles. This is another identifying mark of God's Servant, in turning what had seemingly been a failure in Israel's rejection into a glorious triumph, as God honours the completion of His work on the cross, sending its light throughout the whole world.

References: (1) Is. 49:1-6 (2) John 1:4 (3) Gal. 4:4-5 (4) Mat. 1:18-23 (5) Phil. 2:7 (6) John 6:63 (7) John 6:68 (8) John 7:40 (9) John 17:8 (10) Luke 2:31-32 (11) Acts 13:46-48

Bible quotations from ESV

Fighting for a faith

Peter Hickling, Cromer, England

For thousands of years there have been religious wars, and the situation today has got worse rather than better. Christians have been particularly affected. The Pew Forum and the World Evangelical Alliance jointly estimate that 200 million Christians are either being socially disadvantaged or actively oppressed,¹ particularly in predominantly Islamic states. Guerilla warfare may be directed against Christian civilians. For example, in northern Nigeria there is a separatist group called Boko Haram, whose title means ‘western education is forbidden’. It has often attacked worshippers in churches with automatic weapons, and it was responsible for at least 450 killings in 2011 and 620 in the first six months of 2012.² It must be admitted that Christians (using the term in its widest sense, as those who nominally own that sort of belief) have not been guiltless. Looking back in history, the Crusaders, beginning in the 11th century, fought for the control of Jerusalem. Later on, in the 16th and 17th centuries there were the European wars of religion, when Protestant and Roman Catholic domains clashed following the Reformation. In our own time in the UK we have seen violence between Protestant and Catholic communities in Northern Ireland.

Two questions arise out of this: was the fighting really about religious belief and, most importantly, what should a Christian attitude be, as exemplified by Jesus Christ and the Bible? On the first, examination of most cases will show that the real cause of the conflict was not religious differences, but desire for power, territory or resources, or membership of a different group or class. For example, the militias in Northern Ireland were not shooting each other in defence of different doctrines about the Real Presence or invocation of saints, but because each saw the other as a threat. In the early seventeenth century the British government gave to Scottish and English Protestant settlers land confiscated from the native Irish, in an act called the Plantation of Ireland. The descendants of these people gained a predominant position of power in Northern Ireland, which became part of the United Kingdom, while the rest of Ireland became a republic. The (Catholic) minority believed that they were being discriminated against, and began to take violent action, whereupon the (Protestant) majority felt threatened, leading to open warfare between militias. Thus, although each group characterised themselves by their religious label, this was not what they were fighting about. There is not space here to analyse other cases, but one can nearly always trace non-religious causes.

What should the Christian’s attitude be? Christ Himself made quite unequivocal statements about the disciple’s actions: *“I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone would sue you and take your*



*tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. ... You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.”*³ These words applied to an individual’s response; what about fighting for the establishment of Christ’s kingdom? Jesus was clear about this too. He admitted before Pilate that He was a king, but said, *“My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.”*⁴

It is reasonable to ask, too, whether fighting is justified in any circumstances – say, in defence of the defenceless, or against manifest evil. Within the writer’s lifetime six million Jews were murdered by the German Nazi regime; did that justify a Christian in taking up arms against Germany? The trouble with this is that most people on both sides in the war were carried along with events, and had no wish to kill others, except as part of their orders. They were pawns in the hands of their leaders. It does not seem right that Christians should seek to kill others. Fighting brings out many instances of selfless heroism, but also of cold-blooded hatred. The consistent teaching of the New Testament is that we should seek to live at peace with others: *If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.*⁵

The government of a country, of course, has the responsibility for internal law and order⁶ and the defence of the realm; it is answerable to God for how it does this.⁷

References: (1) The Spectator, 29 December 2012, Editorial (2) Wikipedia article Boko Haram (3) Mat. 5:39-45 (4) John 18:36 (5) Rom. 12:18 (6) Rom. 13:1-4 (7) Dan. 4

Bible quotations from ESV

The 'heavenlies' in Ephesians

Raised, seated, exalted

Greg Neely, Toronto, Canada

It is an awesome truth that *God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ*¹. Because He died we are alive where previously we were helplessly and hopelessly dead in sin.² But there is more!

God *raised us up with Him*.³ That requires a response: *Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above ...*⁴ Such is our intimate, spiritual union with Him that we died, were buried and have been raised with Him. And if that were not enough, we will be raised bodily at His return to the air and changed to reflect the glory of Christ.⁵ Though this has not yet transpired, from God's eternal perspective unfettered by timelines, our being spiritually raised into the heavenly places has already been accomplished! We certainly qualify as those who are 'blessed'. But there is more!

Paul magnifies the picture by declaring that not only have we been raised with Him, but God has also *seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus*.³ From God's eternal perspective, we share His honour, His inheritance, His riches, His glory, His security, His rest. We are children of God and, as Paul tells the Romans, *heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ*.⁶ Where He belongs, we belong; what He inherits, we inherit; where He sits, we sit, all because of Him. No wonder Paul could say that the present sufferings are not worthy to be compared with future glory.⁷ Every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus is ours now, but we'll be able to appreciate it fully then: *Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be*. But we do know that *we will be like Him*.⁸ Awesome thought! The Greek word in the original Scriptures for 'raised' means 'to raise along with'. The word for 'seated' means to 'cause to sit down with'. God has caused us to be raised along with Christ and caused us to sit down in the company of Christ Jesus in the heavenlies. It is based on absolutely no merit of our own; it is all because of Him and with Him. How blessed we are! But there is more!

There is a purpose in our blessing with these present, marvellous, heavenly, spiritual blessings that will extend throughout all eternity: *so that in the ages to come [God] might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus*.⁹ Has He not shown those surpassing riches already in making us alive in Christ, raising us up and seating us with Christ in the heavenlies? Indeed He has. In 1 Corinthians 2:9 Paul says: *"Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has*



God ... raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. (Eph. 2:4,6)

prepared for those who love Him." God's rich grace far surpasses our comprehension. The word 'surpassing' in Greek is from the verb '*hyperballo*' and means 'to throw over or beyond'. Whatever we currently understand of His rich grace, He will transcend. No wonder when Paul was caught up to the third heaven, *because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations ... there was given [him] a thorn in the flesh*.¹⁰ He was privileged to see something of what we hope for in Christ, a spiritual and heavenly reality!

Such exaltation in Christ Jesus cannot be comprehended by our mortal minds. Yet God lavishes His grace upon us¹¹ such that we share it all with Him, now in part, throughout eternity in full.

Does our earthly experience reflect our heavenly position? The heavenlies are, after all, where we are seated with Him!

References: (1) Eph. 2:4-5 (2) Rom. 5:6,8 (3) Eph. 2:6 (4) Col. 3:1-2 (5) 1 Thes. 4:16-17; 1 Cor. 15:52 (6) Rom. 8:17 (7) Rom. 8:18 (8) 1 John 3:2 (9) Eph. 2:7 (10) 2 Cor. 12:7 (11) Eph. 1:7-8

Bible quotations from NASB

Hayes Press

Kevin Hickling, Swindon, England

Looking out of the office window of Hayes Press over the Flaxlands Wood and the countryside beyond, I see the snow falling and, within a short time, the scene becomes completely white. Referring to a different whiteness, the Lord's words, "*the fields are white for harvest*" come readily to mind whilst considering the objectives of the Charity's ministry. By God's grace, Hayes Press, the publishing arm of the Churches of God, has been able to continue with its mission over many years, providing workers with suitable literature and resources to help undertake the great commission in reaching out to the lost and bringing them to a knowledge of the truth.

The origins of the publishing house lie in this very magazine, *Needed Truth*, over a hundred years ago. Prior to *Needed Truth*'s publication, a magazine called 'The Christian Witness' was produced, followed by 'The Present Testimony'. Then, in 1870 from Aberdeen, there followed a more stable magazine which became known as 'The Northern Witness'. During 1879-87 several articles written by such men as F.A. Banks, Dr. Luxmoore, J.A. Boswell and R.T. Hopkins appeared in the *Northern Witness*, but as believers became interested in the truth of the house of God there was a growing desire to reflect this truth in a new magazine. It was for this purpose that 'Needed Truth' was first published, Volume 1 having the date 1888. In this volume there is a lengthy article introducing the magazine and explaining its purpose.

Needed Truth Publishing Office (NTPO) came into existence in the early 1900s, being run from various locations throughout the UK until it eventually came to rest at the rear of the meeting hall of the Church of God in Hayes. At this time, the decision was made to give it the new name of Hayes Press and to establish it as a registered UK charity. This title reflected its location at that time and the broadening list of titles for the dissemination of the Word of God.

Some years later, in 1985, the publishing operation moved again, this time to its own much larger premises in Leicester. This move brought about significant change and steady growth in the following years. Amongst other things, there was



a sizeable increase in its product list, which, as well as three regular magazines produced, included a range of believers' and gospel booklets, gospel tracts, calendars and a selection of Bibles, music, gifts and other Christian literature. Many publications were printed in-house and there were regular mailings to countries throughout the world. There was also increased presence within the Christian book trade, with attendance at many of the book fairs throughout the UK.

In more recent years, Hayes Press has moved once again, and its new home is The Barn at Flaxlands, just outside Swindon. These premises are a new purpose-built unit that provides ideal accommodation for the work, along with a comfortable display area for passers-by to call and browse material over a cup of coffee. Since the move to Swindon, Hayes Press has taken over the tract and poster list previously produced by Victory Tracts & Posters. This in itself has seen our gospel tract range increase to over one hundred titles with almost half a million tracts being sold last year. We continue to produce the children's magazine, *Plus Eagles' Wings (PEW)*, which is used widely in outreach work both in youth clubs/Sunday schools and city missions. Like *Needed Truth*, this magazine has seen many changes over the years and offers a very contemporary read for children.

The internet has had a significant positive impact on the Charity's work inasmuch as the literature is now easily accessible throughout the world on the website, with many publications obtainable as eBooks or PDF downloads, and the *Golden Bells* daily calendar readings may be accessed via RSS feed. A steady growth of contacts through social media sites like Facebook/Twitter has also helped in the extension of the work.

Our prayer is that the literature produced will continue to be taken up by the labourers and used powerfully to the glory of God.