

NT

A pattern for life in God's House

The confident Servant
Carrying one another's burdens
Blitz and peace

The full Gospel:
Scaling the intellectual wall

Issue 3 2013

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✉ The Barn, Flaxlands, Royal Wootton Bassett, Wiltshire, SN4 8DY UK

Communications to the editors:

@ editors@neededtruth.info

✉ c/o Robert Fisher, 258 West Main Street, Whitburn, West Lothian, EH47 0QW Scotland

☎ +44 (0)1501 743811

✉ or Martin Jones, 46 Herne Hill, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, M9A 2X1

Editorial production team: Robert Fisher, Peter Hickling, Geoff Hydon, Brian Johnston, Martin Jones

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From the Editors' desk

The whole counsel of God

When the apostle Paul was taking his leave of the elders of the Church of God in Ephesus, he said, *I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.*¹ That is, he not only testified to the gospel of the grace of God, but also he proclaimed the kingdom.² This is the duty of those who teach the Word of God; not to over-emphasise one particular teaching of Scripture so as to denigrate others, but to give a rounded exposition of what the Scripture says. This is not to deny, of course, that some individuals are given particular gifts as evangelists, pastors or teachers, but they serve in churches with others whose abilities can combine together to provide the whole truth.

This is what this magazine seeks to do. When it was established in 1888 it was called *Needed Truth*, because its editors suggested that there was nothing in published literature that gave direct teaching about that *house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.*³ They said that 'All neglected truth is needed truth',⁴ and thus justified concentrating initially on this aspect of Scriptural teaching. The title of the magazine was even attached by others to the Community of the people who published it – the 'Needed Truth Brethren' – although this was no more than a convenient label.



However, NT is much more than a 'one-stringed fiddle'. Examine this and previous issues, and you will see that it also deals with fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith, such as Justification, accounts of the personal experiences of Christians in times of difficulty, devotional articles and expositions of Old Testament scriptures in an up-to-date context. Editors and contributors seek to express themselves in clear modern 'educated English', so that readers can consider and evaluate what is said. We hope that you will understand and value what you read: if you would like to find out more about the Churches of God please visit our website www.churchesofgod.info.

References: (1) Acts 20:27 (2) Acts 20:24-25 (3) 1 Tim. 3:15, RV (4) *Needed Truth* Vol.1,1888, p.7sig



No cutbacks!

Gilbert Grierson, Knocknacloy, N.Ireland

“I have called this special meeting of all staff because of an emergency that has arisen,” said the Matron of the small hospice¹ in the north of England where I was working some years ago. “We are running short of funds and, because of the recession, charitable giving on which this hospice depends has considerably reduced. The trustees of the hospice are being forced to make cutbacks in expenditure to enable us to remain open and to serve this community. If any members of staff have any suggestions on how we can save money, please speak up!”

“Matron, I have a suggestion to make,” said one nurse. “Our stock of china cups and saucers that we use to serve tea to the patients is getting low because of constant breakages. Could we not just use disposable plastic cups instead of the more expensive china cups?”

The Matron thought for a while, and then replied, “Although it seems a small matter, I believe that the quality of the china cups that we use for our patients is very important. By serving tea in the best cups, we are making an unspoken statement about how we view them and what worth we are putting on them. We are saying that they are worth so much that we are willing to use expensive china cups rather than cheaper plastic disposable ones. We are saying that, in the few weeks that they have left on this earth, they are valuable and cared for, no matter what is their social status in life or their intellectual ability and achievements, and no matter what it costs us. Although we will have to make cutbacks in other areas of expenditure, this is one area we must protect.”

Do you think that Matron had a point?

As I look back on this incident in my own experience, a few thoughts come into my own mind which are connected to it. First, God gave His very best for us. In sending Jesus into this world, God paid a very high price – the highest He could pay. At the same time, He made a statement about how He views us, how much He values us. There were to be no cutbacks in the measure of the love that God was expending to redeem us back to Him. *God is love*,² and what He gave is the very best that Love could give, as reflected in the words of Graham Kendrick:-

Such love, springs from eternity.

Such love, streaming through history.

Such love, fountain of life to me.

O Jesus, such love.

It also calls us to consider the response that we are making to our God *who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all*.³ Mary came with her alabaster jar of precious ointment to break open and pour on the Lord



God made a statement about how much He values us.

Jesus, and the Lord recognised how much Mary valued Him.⁴ ‘What can I give Him, poor as I am?’ asks the writer of the old Christmas carol, and gives the only worthy answer, ‘... give my heart.’⁵

We have a number of hand-crafted articles about the house which are each unique in some way, like a fruit bowl made by a local wood-turner, hand-knitted woollen garments and an embroidered tablecloth. Each item has been made with care. There is a prophecy made by Isaiah concerning those for whom the Lord has paid such a high price and who are the workmanship of His own hands. It says, *He shall see of the travail of His soul and shall be satisfied*.⁶ We are God’s workmanship⁷ and that fact first of all gives Him pleasure as, throughout all eternity, He sees and enjoys the results of His own carefully finished work which caused Him such trouble in His soul. But He also made us to be used, having prepared good works for us to walk in and not just to sit idly on a shelf!

Very importantly, like the terminally ill patients in the hospice who drank tea out of the best china cups, we are given a personal awareness of the worth with which we are regarded by the One who never will make any cutbacks in our care – neither in time nor in eternity.

References: (1) A hospice is a place where terminally ill patients are looked after until their death. (2) 1 John 4:8 (3) Rom. 8:32 (4) John 12:3 (5) Christina Rossetti, (1830-1894) ‘In the bleak mid-winter’ (6) Is. 53:11, RV (7) See Eph. 2:10

Quotations from ESV unless otherwise stated.

The full Gospel

Justified

David Woods, Manchester, England

Think about how the word ‘justify’ is used in everyday language: it usually describes the process of someone proving that he meets certain criteria specified or demanded by others.

If it were a legal setting, then someone accused of a crime would attempt to prove his innocence by demonstrating that he has been abiding by the law of the country. His provable history would justify him, and a convinced judge and jury would pronounce that person ‘not guilty’.

Or think about applying for a job because you know you possess the qualifications and experience listed in the job advertisement. When it comes to the interview you have opportunity to personally expand the details you’ve given in your supplied CV (which has convinced the employer enough to invite you this far). Proven past achievements and your current abilities will justify your suitability to undertake the role, if you are successful and offered the position.

We see that justification has everything to do with past achievements and maintaining a standard expected by others. When we turn to the Bible, ‘justification’ is the act of God declaring a sinner righteous in His sight, an evidently guilty party receiving a ‘not guilty’ verdict! How can that be possible?

Paul quoted a statement originally found in Psalms 14 & 53: *None is righteous, no, not one.*¹ Each person is guilty before a perfect, holy God, guilty of failure to honour Him and to give thanks to Him for being who He is, what He has done and continues to do.² We chose, and continue to choose, to live for ourselves, according to our own

standards rather than God’s.³ God, as the Creator of all things, has every right to set the standards by which life should be lived. Our decisions not to do those things that He says we must do, and to do those things that He says we shouldn’t do, means we are all guilty of sin. We have a tarnished past that’s impossible to hide from an all-seeing and all-knowing God,⁴ who is the Judge of all the earth.⁵ God is not an imperfect judge employed by a state to be the arbiter of an imperfect justice system; the law is His and He is the only one capable of administering His perfect justice without compromising His righteousness.

By experience we know that the consequences of justice are usually greater when an offended person is considered worthy of significant respect and honour within society. I’ve heard it described this way: to slap a friend in the face would probably result in a return slap. To do the same to a policeman would probably result in an arrest. To repeat the act against the leader of the country would probably result in a significant jail term, or, in some countries, the death sentence. We must remind ourselves that our infinitely holy God is immeasurably offended by our sin.

God’s justification of a sinner is only possible because the death of Jesus Christ was on behalf of sinners, and for their sins.⁶ Christ, the one provided by God to be the means by which His love, grace and mercy would come to us, has borne the judgment of God against that sin in the place of the sinner.⁷ God, being satisfied fully by the sacrifice of Jesus (who endured all the wrath of God against the sinner’s sin) is then able to declare the sinner righteous without compromising His holiness and His



justice.⁸ Justification is ours through faith in the Saviour God has provided.⁹

The question remains: why is it righteous for God to punish a righteous person instead of a guilty one? Surely this action is in itself unrighteous, even when the sufferer is willing? One of the best places to turn to in the Bible for a help in understanding this is 2 Corinthians 5:14-21: This declares that *'we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised ... if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come ... in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. ... For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.'*¹⁰ This message is reinforced many times in the New Testament. God sees believers in the Lord Jesus as having been united with Him by faith, so that when He died they died with Christ;¹¹ they are described as 'in Christ'. This is the 'great exchange': God, in His love, considered and treated His Son as a sin bearer (though He was without sin¹²), suffering in His death the righteous wrath of God against sin, so that those who would believe and have faith in Him would then be considered and treated by God as righteous like Jesus Christ! God has declared His full satisfaction in the atoning death of His Son by raising Him from the dead: *[righteousness] will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.*¹³ There was nothing unrighteous in the perfect Saviour that could hold Him in the judgment of death. He lives for our justification.

Christian believers *are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.*¹⁴ Propitiation is a word that describes God being satisfied by the death of His perfect, righteous Son on behalf of believing sinners. The atonement brought about by this reconciles God and men, formerly separated by sin. Notice that justification is a gift, not something earned, but received by faith alone. There is absolutely nothing sinners can provide to earn this righteous standing before God, and we should jettison any thought that we contribute something towards this righteousness.

For centuries various interpretations and teachings have divided Christians on this topic. In the early 16th Century, at the beginning of the Reformation, Martin Luther's understanding of 'justification by faith alone' (*sola fide*) was the main reason for his challenge of the Roman Catholic Church's view of initial justification (achieved at the time a person, or child, is baptised), and permanent justification (achieved by a life of good works and holy living). Protestant churches have since adopted Luther's view, maintaining that justification is not achieved by works but received by faith.¹⁵ That said, some Protestant groups today teach that while justification is by faith



alone, a person can lose his salvation by a failure to maintain his faith, thereby losing his justified standing before God (like securing a place on the team, but then being dropped when the standard of your performance slips).

In Churches of God we believe and teach that justification by faith for salvation is a one-time event in a person's life, a work instigated and completed by God that cannot be overturned. One of the key Scriptures to support this is our series' focus verse, where Paul describes God's actions in the past tense, indicating that something has been done already, completed by God, not men – *those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified ...*¹⁶ The verses that follow on further confirm this once-for-all justification, stressing that it's a work of God alone, and declaring that nothing, and no one, has any ability to reverse God's act of justifying someone. *Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? ... Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? ... [nothing] in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*¹⁷ There's no appeal court here! *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*¹⁸

Scriptures that might, at first reading, give the impression that our salvation and our justified status can be revoked, usually refer to loss of God-given reward for a life that fails to live up to the standard by which God views the justified sinner.¹⁹ We are warned repeatedly to live a life that honours and glorifies God, that declares to God, and to others, the righteousness of Christ. Let's be careful not to fail in our responsibility to live up to what we have become in Christ.

References: (1) Rom. 3:10 (2) see Rom. 1:21 (3) Rom. 3:23 (4) Heb. 4:13 (5) Gen. 18:25 (6) Rom. 5:8 (7) 1 Pet. 2:24; 2 Cor. 5:21 (8) Rom. 3:21-26; 1 Pet. 3:18 (9) Rom. 4:5 (10) see also 1 Pet. 3:18 (11) Rom. 6:8 (12) see 1 Pet. 2:22 (13) Rom. 4:24-25 (14) Rom. 3:24-25 (15) see Eph. 2:8-9 (16) Rom. 8:30 (17) Rom. 8:33-39 (18) Rom. 8:1 (19) see 1 Cor. 3:14-15

Bible quotations from ESV

Scaling the intellectual wall

Karl Smith, Kirkintilloch, Scotland

Some people don't want to believe that the Christian faith is true. They think it will mean they can't do things they want to do. Consequently, they are satisfied with a handful of secular ideas picked up at school, on television or at the pub and dismiss the 'need' to believe in God as a historical hangover from more ignorant times. For others, however, genuine intellectual difficulties baffle any attempt to take the message of the Gospel seriously. Their intellectual honesty forbids them from believing a comforting lie and they feel that too many aspects of our belief contradict key foundations of their education. It is our responsibility to help them to overcome these objections so that they may be won for the Lord who loves them.

The apostle Peter stresses the importance of preparation in this, saying, *be prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you yet do it with gentleness and respect.*¹ People will see how we cope with life and the hope that keeps us going. Nevertheless, in asking us about it, they will expect us to defend our trust in the Lord Jesus with a reason. In this scripture, how we are to do it is as important as what we are to do. How often has Christian witness been ineffective because we have forgotten to do it 'with gentleness and respect'?

In 2010, evangelist Malcolm Macdonald and I conducted a door-to-door survey in Paisley, Scotland, asking people what their reasons were for not believing in God. This was to help us plan a series of seminars called 'Big Questions' at which the top eight answers would be dealt with by a talk and open discussion. Answers mainly fell into four categories:

a) **Philosophical** e.g. "If there is a God, why is there so much suffering?" This was by far the most common answer and can only really be dealt with by sympathetic listening and sensitive discussion of the wounds of Christ.

b) **Scientific** e.g. "Sciences such as geology and biology seem to tell a different story from that of Genesis." It is hard to expect people to believe the message of the Bible when page one seems to contradict everything they learned in school. It is particularly important here to be honest about gaps in our knowledge, but to focus on how the Bible answers the questions science doesn't attempt to

answer; not so much how life emerged, as why? Besides, I personally feel that although scientists are basing their theories on the best evidence available, God has more information at His disposal and is more likely to be right, having been there when the universe emerged.

Extrapolating backwards from contemporary processes to determine how such processes operated in the past is all very well, for example, but pre-supposes as part of its methodology that changes to the order of nature detailed in Genesis and elsewhere did not happen.

c) **Historical** "Religion causes wars and violence." This is perhaps the easiest of these to counter since the secular and openly atheistic regimes of the twentieth century have been even worse.

d) **Textual** "Isn't the Bible full of errors/manipulation?" Whilst most people who made this point were confusing the fictitious world of Dan Brown's 'The Da Vinci Code' with the real one, there are indeed a small number of variant readings between original manuscripts of which more thoughtful people may be aware. Nevertheless most editions of the Bible point these up and argue only for lapses in the copying rather than in the original act of inspiration. Comparison with the basis on which other documents from the same era are accepted as authentic shows how amazingly God has preserved His Word.

It is good to be aware of these ideas, most of which came to prominence in the Western world in the nineteenth century. We don't need to answer them point by point, but sometimes we will need to earn an audience by showing that we have engaged with these ideas and they have not shaken our belief. Paul in Corinth *reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks.*² There is a place for reasoning and persuasion in defence of the Gospel.

Recently Richard Dawkins and John Lennox, both Professors at Oxford University, debated the question 'Has science buried God?' Professor Dawkins began, naturally enough for a professor in biology, by making an apparently convincing case that natural selection alone is able to explain the emergence of the human race. It became clear, however, at the conclusion of Professor Dawkins' opening remarks that his real objection to Christianity was not to do with biology at all. Rather, it was our belief that a God who created this exceedingly complex, yet orderly, universe should be interested enough in human sin and suffering to become man and die for His creatures. It was the opportunity to answer this aspect of Professor Dawkins' speech with an explanation of Calvary that provided the most powerful part of Professor Lennox's argument. It reminded me of Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 1:18-24:

Genuine intellectual difficulties baffle any attempt to take the message of the Gospel seriously.

... the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ... Where is the debater of this age? ... For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

However well prepared we are in the field of apologetics (and we must be prepared), it is ultimately in the cross itself that the power of the Gospel resides. It does indeed defeat our finite rational minds to imagine that God cares about the intimate thoughts of specks of dust on a speck of dust – still more that He should dearly love us. Yet it is the message of the cross that rings true with an appeal to the spirit. Neither does it defy logic, as anyone who reads the book of Romans from beginning to end must acknowledge. It is, however, a divine logic which leaves the loveless logic of man standing at the starting line. In the Wisdom of God, the cross has satisfied God in all the characteristics that our finite minds might find contradictory: His holiness, His justice, His mercy and His love. We must keep steering the conversation back to this ‘foolishness’ because it is this upon which the Spirit of God works to bring conviction of sin, righteousness and judgement.



Their intellectual honesty forbids them from believing a comforting lie and they feel that too many aspects of our belief contradict key foundations of their education.

Our series began by thinking of intellectual barriers our listeners might have to the gospel as a wall that we need to scale. The image the Bible uses is a ‘veil’, a curtain covering over the truth, meaning that people ‘just can’t see it’:

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.³

Satan is using everything in his power to prevent people from seeing the glory of what Christ achieved on the cross and from recognising His heavenly splendour. Earlier Paul spoke compassionately of the veil over the minds of his own nation, the Jews: *But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted. As a result, a veil lies over their hearts.⁴* Hardened minds leading to unresponsive hearts – could there be a more accurate description of the hard soil we are breaking up today? Thankfully, Paul also provides the answer to the problem: *only through Christ is it taken away.⁴* By all means deal with the objections people have, but return often to the lovely personality of Christ, to the cross and Jesus glorified there.

Finally, don’t lose confidence in the truth of the Gospel. My knowledge of science could be written on the back of a postage stamp and anyone who has achieved decent high school grades in any one of the sciences could make mincemeat of me in debate on the Genesis account of creation, for example. Indeed, this has happened many times! Nevertheless, our powers of reasoning are part of that finite, fallen human entity called ‘the flesh’. We are equipped with something stronger:

For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.⁵

Whereas Peter focused on defence of our hope, Paul takes us on to the attack. This is the message of the cross, expressed in the Scriptures. Now more than ever we must take it out to a blinded world and shine its light into the minds of our friends, neighbours and fellow human beings across the world.

References: (1) 1 Pet. 3:15 (2) Acts 18:4 (3) 2 Cor. 4:3-4 (4) 2 Cor. 3:14-15 (5) 2 Cor. 10:4-5

Bible quotations from the ESV

One-anothering

Carrying one another's burdens

Paul Merchant, Musselburgh, Scotland

“I hope he dies before I do”, the leaflet cover said in bold print beside a photo of an elderly mother and her disabled son. These shocking and heartfelt words of an elderly parent were used recently by a Scottish charity to challenge the government for more residential care for disabled sons and daughters with ageing parents. We look around and see so many people carrying burdens, some obvious, but many in secret, whether family, neighbours, work colleagues or minority groups in society. Then there are whole societies in parts of the world enduring the burdens of poverty, hunger and hopelessness.

Personal burdens

Ralph is a friend who has multiple sclerosis, which is a degenerative disease of the nervous system with no cure. He now uses crutches indoors and a wheelchair outdoors, has become incontinent, has impaired cognition and his marriage has just ended. He carries the burden of a slow downward spiral into helplessness. This is where Christian compassion and practical support can relieve some of the burden. The regular home visit, phone call, keeping in touch texting, and having the occasional, relaxing evening out can all make a person feel valued when they may not value themselves. The listening ear of a patient friend costs nothing, yet is so valuable.

There are many other examples of burdens that can be reduced. The increasing needs of our expanding elderly population in many churches with their needs, some obvious and others hidden. So many ageing friends protect their sense of independence when there is a need for support from others. We may envy grandparents and their pleasures, but they supply 40% of childcare for parents who are working or studying and over 70% of childcare the rest of the time, which can feel as if the responsibility of bringing up children becomes a burden placed on dutiful grandparents.¹

Spiritual burdens

*Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.*² The context of this exhortation is about how to relate to a disciple who has succumbed to temptation. The Apostle Paul, in his rich experience of pastoral care, urges Christian to relate with concern and spiritual discernment to those weaker in the faith. Others are oppressed by particular personal, chronic temptation and need our support in their resistance rather than dismissive criticism behind their backs. Others may be assailed by doubt of their Christian faith, or enduring their Christian life in a small church, or attracted to the private, secret world of the uncensored internet. One of the ways to share the burden is for the person to agree to be accountable by meeting regularly with a trusted Christian



Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. (Gal. 6:2)

to share progress in keeping to agreed boundaries and thereby reduce the occasions when the temptation trips them up. The weight of the spiritual burden is cast off. From spiritual fatigue to freedom in Christ.

Social burdens

Christians see the burden of sin having a corrosive effect on their local communities and seek to alleviate the burden and suffering by setting up charities. The Haven near Glasgow, Scotland, is a Christian charity that assists adults to get free of addictions and to gain their self-respect and to live independently. Addicts are challenged with the gospel and many come to faith and freedom in Christ. Their double burden is lifted. One is from the burden of physical addiction to harmful substances and the other is from the burden of their sins, lifted when a person believes in the death of Christ for their sins.

The Lord Jesus famously said, *“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”*³ Christ makes an invitation to take what he offers. The yoke Jesus describes is the shoulder harness across two oxen which keeps the animals side by side, pulling the plough together. So it is for all those who are weary and burdened and hear Christ's invitation to take his yoke and walk with him day by day.

References: (1) Family – keeping you in touch, Care for the Family magazine, Cardiff, 2013 edition (2) Gal. 6:2 (3) Mat. 11:28-30 Bible quotations from NIV

Letter writing

Rhetorical devices

Martin Jones, Toronto, Canada

Given that 1 Peter 3:19-21 is probably one of the most difficult Bible passages to decipher, you couldn't have blamed Paul for raising an eyebrow if he'd ever read Peter's statement that some of the things Paul wrote were hard to understand! The irony is that, unlike Peter, the rough pebble, polished Pharisee Paul seemed to deliberately structure his writing to make the message stick and win the hearts and minds of his audience.

Indeed, the evidence suggests that Paul was much more gifted a writer than a speaker – he was bluntly told as much by the Corinthians!¹ And yet, sometimes when we read his letters today, we're baffled about, bored by or even blinded because of, his methods.

But, as Peter acknowledged, Paul always wrote *with the wisdom that God gave him*² – wisdom which encompassed both exactly what was to be said (content) and how it was to be said (form). Any deficiency in understanding must lie with the reader, not with what's written – so, while relying on the Spirit, we need to learn the 'rhetorical ropes'. Yes, there's a value in what might seem surface reading – as any contact with God's Word has immense power; the merest contact with the garment hem of Word-made-flesh still had power to heal. But a firm grip on God's Word will open up still deeper resources.

Grasping basic rhetoric (the art of effective speaking and writing) is key to 'getting' Paul. People in Paul's day were formally trained to write using these tools of rhetoric, so such uses would be expected of him even though the technical labels are now very unfamiliar to most of us. Don't be intimidated – just remember that rhetoric is all about persuasion. Every modern politician's speech is full of it!

We're going to look at three sets of three. The first key is to understand this background trio:

- '*Kairos*' – the context of the attempt to persuade. Politicians may speak to promote their own manifesto, to analyse an event, or to respond to criticism. **Why** was Paul trying to persuade? In 1 Corinthians, Paul was responding to a set of questions and reported internal strife; in Galatians he was combating backsliding; in 1 Timothy he was imparting personal advice.
- audience – politicians alter their speech when addressing the public, compared to, for example, other governments. **Who** was Paul trying to persuade? Jews, Gentiles, new Christians, individuals, opponents?
- decorum – the aptness of the speech to persuade, which is driven by context and audience. This explains why old-school Etonians suddenly start speaking in modern slang when they want to convince their audience that



they are men of the people! **How** was Paul trying to persuade? The style of 2 Corinthians is very different from, say, 2 Timothy!

Continuing the 'how' aspect, there were also three means of persuasion by appealing to different things. Look for where Paul uses these techniques in all his letters, but they all appear even in brief Philemon:

- to logic (logos) – Paul asserts Onesimus is now useful to Philemon, so it is logical to receive him back.
- to emotion (pathos) – Paul plays on his old age and his description of Onesimus as "his very heart".
- to character (ethos) – Paul positions himself as a trusted fellow-soldier, fellow-worker, brother and partner.

Lastly, we come to the '**what**' of persuasion. Again there are three main categories of what the audience was to be persuaded of, each of which features in Philemon:

- 'Judicial' or 'forensic' persuasion – this relates to past events. The orator is accusing or defending. Politicians will often use rhetoric to defend their record in government or seek to accuse their opponent of not having handled something correctly. Paul defends Onesimus and his past actions, speaking on his behalf as an advocate.
- 'Deliberative' persuasion – this relates to events that are potentially future. The orator is exhorting the audience to certain conduct or behaviour. Politicians often use rhetoric to try to persuade voters that it would be a good thing for them to vote them into office! Paul tries to persuade Philemon to undertake a course of action – to forgive Onesimus and receive him back.
- 'Epideictic' or 'ceremonial' persuasion – politicians often give speeches which praise a person's current conduct and character (e.g. recent tributes to Sir Alex Ferguson in Britain) or condemn them (e.g. President Bush and the alleged Iranian axis of evil, or President Obama and Syria's President Assad). Paul commends Philemon for his work in the church and his good character.

Considering the 'who, why, what and how' of persuasion will greatly aid our reading of Paul. But the point of it all is so that we, too, can then be persuaded of the great practical and doctrinal truths that he was so passionate about communicating.

References: (1) 2 Cor. 10:10 (2) 2 Pet. 3:15, NIV

Fellowship in rest

The peace offering

Martin Archibald, Paisley, Scotland

It was a day of real joy as well as thankful relief. The Ark of the Covenant had been safely carried to the tent King David had pitched for it in Jerusalem. The disgrace and grief of the first attempt to bring it back to Jerusalem from enemy territory, that had ended in death, was behind them. The God of the Law was now worthily honoured among His people.¹ Jerusalem – this new national centre – had been won by the king from a boastful enemy,² and fitting tribute had been made to the God who had helped him unite the nation. Now, offerings were giving God His rightful place in the kingdom He had established in the land. The Ark, which had been carried through the Sinai desert and then across the Jordan riverbed between walls of water, was near its final rest.³

So peace offerings rightly featured among the wealth of sacrifice made that day, as led by the king.⁴

The peace, or fellowship, offering – called in Hebrew *'shelem'* from *'shalam'*, 'to make peace' – gave opportunity to a man and his family to share in honouring God for success in farming, or trade, to mark a vow, or any other occasion that brought a sense of God's blessing upon them. Of special significance is the necessity of peace offerings that were to be made on behalf of the whole people, rather than as sacrifices by individuals.⁵ When God had received His portion on the altar (Leviticus 3 focuses entirely on that), the whole household could eat the meat and bread together in the courts of the Lord. It was a very memorable meal, which involved, for most in the land, a family journey from home to the sanctuary. A greater privilege than enjoying the sights of the king's city was to eat together in the presence of the Lord, with priests and Levites and the spiritual life of Israel all around them.⁶

Parallels with the Lord's Remembrance

There then, is a first message for us today. Believers in Christ who have answered His call to service in the house of God gather on the Lord's day to remember Him who brought us peace with God forever.⁷ He calls us to the closeness of eating and drinking together at His table; to enter into His rest, with His Father, and with each other.⁸ Those who present themselves before God like this should be different in attitude and behaviour, with this shown in their very faces.

But do I come to the meeting place in the condition that allows these features to be seen in truth? Does it show in my face when I speak to each person I meet after the Remembrance? Do I spend time with the children, I who am a child of God, and forgiven so much? It begins with quiet time before the Lord in daily reading and prayer; prayer also in the heat of the day's business and troubles



and pleasures. Then comes examining my life while listening to what the Holy Spirit wants to say. Then I will have something to offer when I join with the others, and I will value what others say also. God wants it to be a time of peace together for all in His family who are gathered in pledge to keep His word. It thus becomes important to express our thanksgiving in a way that all can share in, as implied in Paul's point that others should be edified.⁹

This offering allowed use of the female as well as the male, and it could be sheep, cattle or goat. So, as we saw in the burnt offering, there was allowance made for those who had less. God provided for the exercise of all whom He had blessed, for He values what any can give, *according to what one has, not according to what he does not have.*¹⁰ There is no mention of pigeon or dove, doubtless because they could hardly be shared around a family.

What fellowship involves

Sadly, one of David's family – his own wife – was not with him in his rejoicing at the return of the Ark. There was too much of her father Saul in Michal to appreciate what David valued. He was the man after God's heart. We can feel what a pity that was then. But what about now, if we know that someone is falling short of the grace of God; not sure to be present at meetings when (s)he could be; not involved? We are all under instruction to see that others are not going under in the daily battle for spiritual health. *Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord.*¹¹ If a fellow Christian is not at rest, neither should I be. So if we don't make the effort to help, we dim our own view of the Lord. Paul says; go after one who has erred, with wise care in case we also fail.¹² John says of the intercessor: ... *he will ask, and [God] will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death.*¹³

God's portion

What went to the altar was first the fat of the animal, which was a sign of its well-being, and the quality of pasture it had lived in. It suggests to us that supreme quality in heaven's finest One that only God can appreciate in full. The communion of heaven was His environment, and who can enter into the reach of divine thought and love among Father, Son and Spirit? Yet we

may reach something of that sacred view if we spend time thinking about what God saw in Christ – in the same way that someone might look into deep water, or search the starry sky. It is a vision that deepens the quality of our communion, and our offerings before the throne of God. The seasoned long-distance traveller develops a look around the eyes that shows where his vision has been focused; so also the face of a seafarer who daily searches far horizons. Reflection on heavenly perspectives leaves its mark on us.

The kidneys of the offering were also to be consumed on the altar. They depict the discernment of Him *in whom are hidden the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*.¹⁴ The sensitivity and range of the Son's judgement is of a different order from the moral and cognitive competence of man. Rightly He alone qualifies to be appointed judge of all human response.¹⁵ But again, the eyes of our hearts may be enlightened as we reflect on those judgements of Christ that are recorded for us, as in John 8.

The priest's reward

The peace offering for thanksgiving was to be accompanied by grain offerings, and part of them was leavened bread. *'And from it he shall offer one cake ... as a heave offering to the LORD.'*¹⁶ This was for the priest, recalling how our Lord said, *"I am the bread of life..."*¹⁷ It is our privilege that we are made priests as well as offerers, where there is a united priesthood.¹⁸ Let us enter

into these truths to the full, as God intends, and not be content with the resources of individual believers only, many though they be.

The king's blessing

With true fellowship and peace comes generosity, and David abundantly blessed his people when the Ark reached Jerusalem: *he gave a loaf of bread, a cake of dates and a cake of raisins to each Israelite man and woman*.¹⁹ Bread maintains life. The date palm was a symbol of fruitfulness and of rest at an oasis in the desert journey. Raisins offer moist sweetness. All were practically chosen for pilgrims going home. So may we also be blessed by our King as we find fellowship and rest in His presence on the road to our heavenly home.

References: (1) 2 Sam. 6:1-19 (2) 2 Sam. 5:6-10; 1 Chron. 11:4-9 (3) Josh. 3:14-17 (4) 1 Chron. 16:1-2,4 (5) e.g. Lev. 9:18; 23:19; Num. 10:10 (6) Deut. 12:5-8 (7) Rom. 5:1 (8) 1 Cor. 10:16,21 (9) 1 Cor. 14:17 (10) 2 Cor. 8:12 (11) Heb. 12:14 (12) Gal. 6:1 (13) 1 John 5:16 (14) Col. 2:3 (15) John 5:22; Acts 17:31 (16) Lev. 7:14 (17) John 6:35 (18) 1 Pet. 2:5; Rev. 1:6 (19) 1 Chron. 16:3 NIV The word 'dates' used in the NIV has more consistency here, since dates are more portable over a distance than the 'piece of meat' of the NKJV ('meat' is in italics, marking only a conjecture).

Bible quotations from NKJV unless stated otherwise

Out of the storm

Stephen McCabe, Belfast, N.Ireland

What a moment for Job. After struggling with suffering, agonising over the meaning of the pain that has ravaged his life, the LORD Himself answers him – *out of the whirlwind*.¹ God spoke *out of the storm* (NIV). Perhaps we conceive of conversation with God as a comfortable, cosy, thing. It wasn't like that for Job.

What did God say? *"Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?"*² God asks Job the question that confounds human knowledge and experience. He then proceeds to describe His sovereign role in cosmology,³ meteorology⁴ and zoology.⁵ It is a staggering passage, beautiful in its poetry and profound in its theological implications.

Again comes the intensity of the whirlwind,⁶ buffeting Job with questions that drive home the contrast between God's all-knowing and all-

powerful perspective on the world and our own.

When we get that sense of God's perspective, we must ask: who are we, before God? All earthly knowledge falls flat when we experience that One who is the infinite source of being. Confronted with the fount of immeasurable knowledge and power, Job is left in humility. *"I know that you can do all things ... I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know."*⁷

In life, the whirlwind, the storm can be intense – but if God is speaking in that situation, then it is for our good. Let's make sure we are listening – that will mean spending time in His Word, not just when we are enjoying a spiritual 'high', but during the storm as well. And if we experience Him speaking out of the storm, we will come away with the same sentiment



as Job – awe at glimpsing His perspective.

That's how it is with God. Even in the storm, we never lose hope because we are in relationship with the One who is sovereign over all things – the animal world, the atmospheric circulation of the earth, the creation and upholding of the universe ... everything. Like Job, with the LORD, the end of the journey is always more blessed than the beginning.⁸

*For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.*⁹

References: (1) Job 38:1 (2) 38:4 (3) 38:4-21 (4) 38:22-38 (5) 38:39-39:30 (6) 40:6-41:26 (7) 42:2-3 (8) 42:12 (9) Rom. 8:18-25 Bible quotations ESV

Blitz and peace

An interview with John Stoner, Newcastle, England

John, recalling a personal conversation in which you talked quite graphically of boyhood war-time experiences and how formative a role they were to play in later life, I wonder if you would care to share these with a wider audience, beginning with a little about your early circumstances?

My parents were faithful believers and I was brought up in a God-fearing environment where Christ was honoured and practical Christianity much in evidence, (typically my parents took into our family a German Jewish refugee boy to protect him from Hitler; he joined our family in 1937, he was 6 and I was 7). Our home was in Hayes in S.E. London.

Have you any very specific recollections of that time?

On October 26, 1940, I was 10 and the Battle of Britain was at its height, with almost continuous air raids. My father was away working at this time. In the late evening our house received a direct hit. I regained consciousness after some time and found myself pinned down very tightly under a weight of debris. My first thought was that I was going to die, but then I thought that if I called to God surely He would save me. This I did, and God responded, and I was eventually rescued by God-fearing and brave men from a rescue team (for which they received the George Medal).

Your personal experience doubtless strengthened your faith, but did other things dent it?

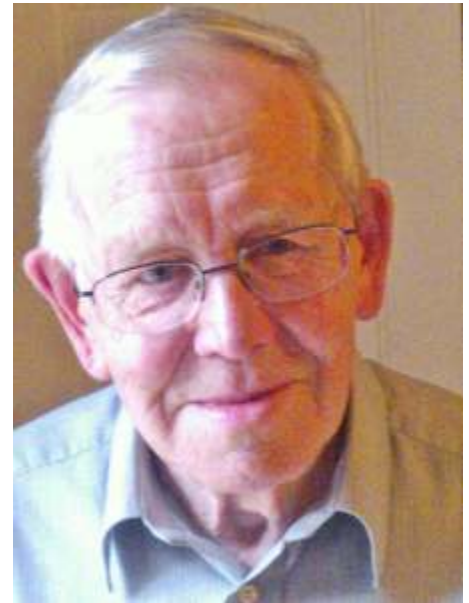
In hospital, I found that my mother and brother had been rescued too, but later my faith was severely tested

when I discovered that others had not survived. These included my younger sister of whom I was very fond, the German boy, and a friend who was staying with us. I had to learn that it is as Jesus said, "...not my will, but yours, be done."¹ That was very hard, and I was confronted with the question: why have some been taken and some left? Why had we sheltered the Jewish boy only for him to be killed by one of Hitler's bombs? It was not because some were better than others, I was sure.

As you look back now, what are your thoughts, and what else would you say that you learned?

Have I in any way fulfilled the purpose for which I was spared? A challenging thought. And yes, there was a further lesson to learn. Our home had gone and all our possessions. I had to learn that these things can be removed in a moment and we must not set too much importance on them. Also irreplaceable lives had been lost – "... one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."²

It was not until later and I was older that I fully realized what my parents had suffered, not only the loss of their only daughter, a home and all possessions, but also financially (no war damage compensation was made until 1948). They never let their worries get through to my brother or me and never showed that they had any doubts. But their faith was, I am sure, very sorely tested. They were always a great encouragement to me. *Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.*³



At what point in all this did you become assured of salvation and desire to be a disciple?

We next had to live temporarily in Cambridge where my father was working, and although we were located distant from any local Church of God, so many in the Fellowship of the Churches of God showed their sympathy and care in practical ways despite the fact that some of them were suffering at that time too. They did it for love of the Lord, I know, and we must thank Him for providing this help when so much needed.

At the age of 13, I came to realize that it is not what you know but Who you know, and I put my personal trust in the Lord Jesus and was baptized soon afterwards and added to the Church of God in Hayes, to which area we were able to return about a year later.

I have always felt that the lessons learned very suddenly in my younger years have helped me to be a better follower than I might have been, but I know that I have failed many times, but the Lord has always been there: "I will never leave you nor forsake you."⁴

References: (1) Luke 22:42 (2) Luke 12:15 (3) Heb. 13:7 (4) Heb. 13:5

Bible quotations from ESV

The Battle of Britain was at its height, with almost continuous air raids. In the late evening our house received a direct hit. I regained consciousness after some time and found myself pinned down very tightly under a weight of debris.

Christ in Isaiah

The Confident Servant

Geralde Mag-usara, Davao, Philippines

Please read Isaiah 50:4-11

Perhaps you know about the boy who was excited to receive a special birthday gift from his father. It was wrapped in a box. However, when he opened it, he felt great disappointment. His favourite toy appeared broken and that caused him to cry. He was relieved when his father pointed out the instructions written on the outside of the box which explained how the toy was to be assembled. Once he knew this, the boy had confidence to put it together again whenever it came apart.

In such a way, confidence is learned. Yahweh's Servant, sent to fix this broken and weary world, learned day-by-day from God's instructions what to do and say. "*The Lord GOD has given Me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him who is weary. He awakens Me morning by morning, He awakens My ear to hear as the learned.*"¹ Dake comments that this was the 'personal training of the Messiah'.² That's why He spoke and did only the things He had heard and received from God.³ Unlike Israel who rebelled against God, Yahweh's Servant never became rebellious but always remained faithful.⁴ Perhaps the primary instruction with which God equipped His Servant concerned how the weary (burdened sinners) should find rest.⁵

To make this a reality, He was prepared to take the form of a Servant.⁶ It has been said that serving always starts with humility.⁷ This was true of the greatest Servant's life on earth. He was humiliated, rejected, and persecuted.⁸ However, His attention did not focus on the severe sufferings He experienced at the hands of His persecutors; but He focused on fulfilling God's will.⁹ In fact, the Hebrew word for servant is 'ebed' which means a 'worker who belongs to a master'.¹⁰ This focus gave Him the endurance to sacrifice His life voluntarily which gave such pleasure to His Master.¹¹

However, a lot of people were displeased even as He pleased Yahweh. He spoke the truth, but jealous religious leaders were against it.¹² They falsely accused Him of having Beelzebub; being a malefactor; of perverting the nation and forbidding the giving of tribute to Caesar etc.¹³ Virtually no-one dared to vindicate Him. Pilate found Him to be without fault, and tried to free Him, but it didn't work since his heart – like that of us all - was laden with sin.¹⁴ Few knew that God approved of what Christ had done. But still Christ trusted Yahweh.¹⁵ The Father saw He had done nothing wrong.¹⁶ This gave the Servant great confidence that the Sovereign Lord would vindicate Him throughout all His physical sufferings, such that He could say: *He is near that justifies Me; Who will contend with Me?*¹⁷ It has been rightly said that in the face of unjust accusations, the Servant was confident that



Yahweh would not only conduct His defence, but also secure and pronounce His acquittal.¹⁸ God vindicated Christ when, after He died, He raised Him from the dead forever.¹⁹

And so we have learned that:

- The Messiah listened and fully performed God's instruction (vv. 4-5);
- While obedient to His will, He suffered even although He'd done no wrong (vv. 6-7);
- God declared His Servant 'not guilty' of all the false accusations (and so vindicated Him over His enemies) when He raised Him from the dead (vv. 8-9).

Similar things to these may well also happen in the lives of faithful believers. No matter how obedient we are, this doesn't mean we will be exempt from hardship in our lives. The Lord's earliest disciples experienced it.²⁰ But God will never allow us to be defeated, but will vindicate us also.²¹ By virtue of Christ's finished work on the cross, we can confidently claim we are already on the winning side.²² Trials or persecutions could happen anytime; but Yahweh's Servant has given us the perfect example of how to trust in the name of the Lord.²³ Someone has written: 'A sincere servant of God may for a long time be without views of eternal happiness. What is likely to be an effectual cure in this sad case? Let him trust in the name of the Lord ...'²⁴ When Christ comes to get His Church (His body), all the sufferings we experience in this world will be gone. Until then, the Servant in verse 10 encourages us to trust in the Lord even when we experience the darkness of trials and sufferings. In verse 11, He discourages us from trusting in our own light (or works) for salvation. John Wesley described the 'all you' in Isaiah 50:11 as those who reject the light which God sets up, and seek comfort and safety by means of their own inventions. Anyone who thinks to get deliverance by his/her own effort will lie down in sorrow (v.11).

References: (1) Is. 50:4 NKJV (2) Dake's Annotated Reference Bible, p.719 (3) John 8:26; 17:7-8 (4) Is. 50:4; John 12:49 (5) Mat. 11:28; Luke 10:20 (6) Phil. 2:7 (7) Wisdom Walks, Dan Britton et al, p.118 (8) Is. 50:6-7; Mat. 26:67-68; John 1:10-11; Is. 53:3-12 (9) Luke 22:42 (10) The New Bible Dictionary, IVF, 1962 Edition, p.1166 (11) Heb. 10:5-7 NKJV (12) Mark 14:53 (13) Mark 3:22; John 18:30; Luke 23:2 (14) Luke 23:14-23; Rom. 3:23 (15) Ps. 118:8-9 (16) 2 Cor. 5:21 (17) Is. 50:8-9 (18) Second Isaiah, North, p. 204 (19) Acts 3:14-15 (20) Rom. 8:36 (21) Rom. 8:31 (22) John 16:33 (23) Is. 50:10 (24) Matthew Henry

A new Pope

Peter Hickling, Cromer, England

I was in Malta earlier this year, and one evening a great explosion of fireworks announced the appointment of a new Pope. Most of the people of Malta are intensely Roman Catholic, and they rejoiced to hear of a new head of their Church. The owner of a café which we often go into showed us a copy of the Malta Times with a pull-out section about him, saying that she liked the look of him, and from what he said about a ‘church for the poor’ he seemed to be a good man.

Was she right? What makes someone a Christian, of course, is faith in Christ, the confession that ‘Jesus Christ is Lord’.^{1,2} God only knows men’s hearts; we can only judge them by what they say and do. The Lord Jesus Himself said of false teachers, “*You will recognise them by their fruits,*”³ and James writes that *faith apart from works is useless*.⁴ The Pope has renounced some of the ostentation of his predecessors, and resolved to live a simpler life. He has proved himself to be a defender of the poor. It remains to be seen what he does in future.

However, the Pope is the head of a church of some 1.2 billion people, of whom around 40% are now in Latin America. Roman Catholicism has declined in its traditional strongholds in Europe, while increasing in Latin America and Africa. The Philippines, where the establishment of several churches of God has been reported in these pages, is the fifth most Catholic country in the world. Why should this cause concern? Because the Catholic church has built up an edifice of belief over the centuries which embroiders Scripture and indeed undermines its authority. They view the Lord’s word to Peter in Matthew 16:18 as giving him primacy over all Christians, and the right to pass this authority on, as ‘apostolic succession’. Yet the Scripture does not say or even imply this. The tradition arose that the ‘Bishop of Rome’ was Christ’s representative on earth, and was empowered to speak authoritatively on His behalf; again, there is no Scriptural evidence for this. Many other practices grew up over the centuries, each validated by appeal to the traditions of a church hierarchy that had

devised them. Such things as the doctrine of transubstantiation, unfounded teachings about the person of Mary and asking for the intercession of saints are examples of this.

This is basically a question of authority: does this lie with a Church that was given power to say what should be believed, with direct revelation to its leader from God, or does it come from an inspired revelation that is permanent? In the case of the first, a structure which gives rise to a pyramid of power such as the Catholic Church has, is likely to throw up men who will use it for personal or political purposes, and there have been many examples of this in history – and some even today. Moreover, the system persuades ordinary people who simply want to worship God that their position before Him depends on their carrying out an established liturgy. In distinction to this, Scripture claims authority for itself: *All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness*.⁵ This, of course, was written before the full canon of New Testament scripture was written and collated; the Old Testament was regarded as God’s Word, and the New Testament writings that we have today were recognised very early on as having the same authority. Since they were given, no-one has the right to add to them. The Churches of God, who publish this magazine, firmly believe in the principle of *sola scriptura* (by Scripture alone): this was one of the founding truths of the Reformation. We believe that the Bible contains all knowledge necessary for salvation and holiness.

Thus we can conclude that although Pope Francis seems to be a good man, the Church he heads maintains many unscriptural practices, which lead many pious people away from the simplicity of faith in Christ.

References: (1) Rom. 10:9 (2) 1 Cor. 12:3 (3) Mat. 7:16 (4) Jas. 2:20 (5) 2 Tim. 3:16

Bible quotations from ESV



The 'heavenlies' in Ephesians

A celestial classroom

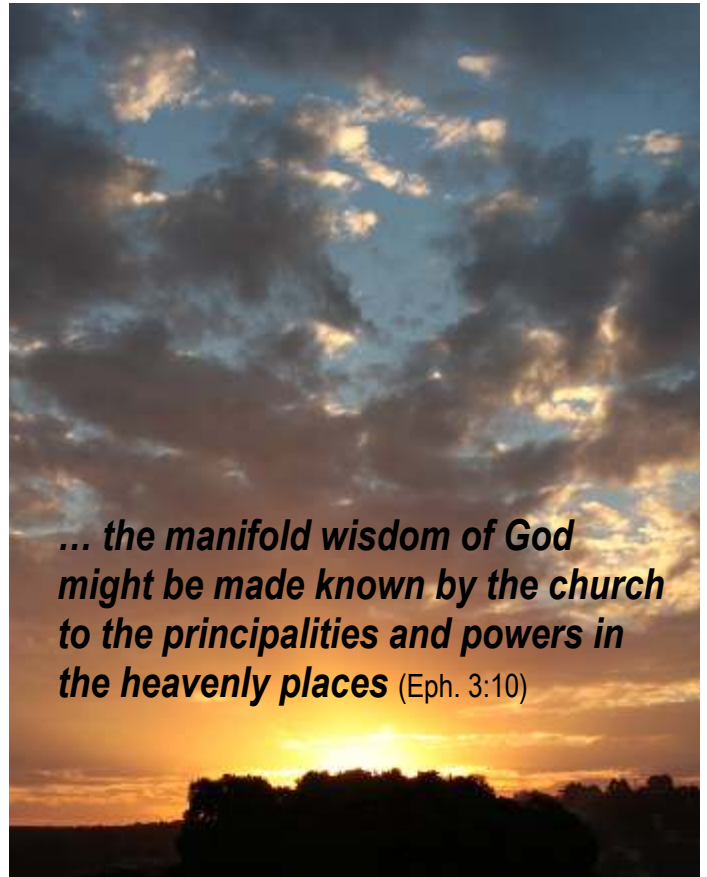
Jonny Archibald, Glasgow, Scotland

Ephesians is an eye-opening letter in many respects; it contains a measure of the true extent of God's purposes, His grace and His blessings upon believers and all this was written in a very concentrated form. It was given through the work of the Spirit and the output of the Apostle Paul. In Chapter 3 Paul moves to a personal account of his own place in God's purposes. Paul is deeply aware of his own shortcomings: *To me who am less than the least of all the saints*¹ (a saint here, of course, in its Biblical sense). We can be confident that this record of Paul's own self-assessment was not put in as an invitation for a well-meaning fellow-believer to massage his ego. Paul had been one who had arranged for the imprisonment and putting to death of disciples in Churches of God. If anyone was ever qualified to live with regrets it was Paul and he was clearly aware of his own failings, past and present, in view of the majestic extent of God's purposes in his day and time. Through God's grace those same majestic purposes remain in place today, just as in Paul's day, but their fulfilment is so much nearer! Paul recognised his own frailty but was not bound by it, neither using it as a defence or an excuse. We can often be bound by our own past failings or use them as an excuse to avoid a more full commitment, just when the Spirit can be speaking to our hearts and minds about taking steps, by God's help, to improve our own witness and the witness of the churches both for God and to God.

Turning to the verse that covers our headline topic, a condensed version of the verse and context reads as follows:

*To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ ... to the intent that now **the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places**, according to the eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord ...*²

There is great depth in the passage and the first obvious point is that there is a clear contrast between the human failings of the Apostle Paul and the wealth of grace given to him to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ. To borrow a phrase from the last edition of NT on this topic, there is more! So much more: while Paul's responsibility was to deliver some of the vast spiritual riches of Christ to non-Jews, in doing so the manifold³ wisdom of God would be made known to angelic beings, both bad and good, in heaven! Occasionally human instinct tells us that we are being watched and our natural reaction is to look up to find the source. How often we live our spiritual lives looking only down or in front, whilst all around, in our service and in our walk, God's wisdom can be seen



... the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places (Eph. 3:10)

from up in the heavens through our obedience to Him. How small do we feel when living with that perspective!? It shouldn't then surprise us that, having revealed this great responsibility to those in Ephesus, Paul could go on to say: *Therefore I ask that you do not lose heart.*⁴ That sentence may have been recorded by Paul but it feels more like a direct encouragement from God Himself to us today. Not only was there encouragement through the Apostle, but he was motivated to help those in Ephesus as follows:

*For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner man. ...*⁵

Encouragement and prayer; a true spiritual response and a wonderful combination for those in Ephesus as they lived out their lives before God and in view of all heaven. Oh that we would be motivated to live like that!

References: (1) Eph. 3:8 (2) Eph. 3:8,10-11 (3) 'Manifold' could perhaps best be translated as 'many featured'. See Rom. 11:33 for example. (4) Eph. 3:13 (5) Eph. 3:14-16

Bible quotations from Revised Authorised Version (NKJV) equivalent.

Vacation Bible Courses

Mark Imoukhuede, Surulere, Nigeria with John Black, Greenock, Scotland

In 1962 a preacher presented the Gospel in a school in Lagos. A lad who was present showed no interest in the message. By his own confession, he was playing around at the back of the class, but the preacher quoted the Lord's questions to Hagar, "Where have you come from, and where are you going?"¹ This last question raised concerns with the boy, Sylvester Eke – who is now in the Church of God in Owerri. He wondered where he would go when life was over. It troubled him for two years, until Scottish evangelist Willie Stewart was holding special Gospel meetings in Surulere, Lagos, Nigeria in 1964. A boy, who was randomly given an invitation leaflet on the street, passed it on to Sylvester, who accepted the invitation. When he heard the Gospel, he trusted the Lord Jesus as his Saviour. Shortly after that, he was baptized and added to the Church of God in Surulere.

Six months later, in April 1965, John Black arrived in Lagos. Sylvester said to him, "I got saved because a preacher came to our school. Let us go to the schools." In 1966 Bible teacher George Prasher observed that, although we were in touch with many young people, they were not coming to the Church meeting hall. He suggested running a Vacation Bible Course to introduce them to our meeting place. This started an annual event that has continued until the present day without a break, apart from one year (1967).

Other churches of God, and indeed other Christian believers, have profitably followed Surulere's example and run Vacation Bible Courses. Fifty to sixty schools and thousands of young people are reached in this way each year. Eternity alone will reveal the harvest that has been, and will be,



reaped – if the Lord tarries – directly and indirectly through this productive work. The Lord has touched many lives through it. One of our 1970 students, who is now a medical officer in London, met me at Paddington Station in 2008 and testified to the goodness of God in her life which started when she attended the VBC and gave her life to Jesus Christ.

Tony Nemi, now in full time work for the Lord, was contacted through the VBC!

We learn some invaluable lessons from this experience. No one knows the outcome of even one act done for the Lord, or the blessing that will flow on for eternity. Nor should we overlook how it all started, long before 1962! Who led that unknown preacher to the Lord? And who played a part in Willie Stewart's spiritual heritage? There are so many interwoven strands to this story. We can trace its origins even farther down the years to the cross of Christ:

Rich harvest from a corn of wheat once scattered;
Sheaves for His praise and endless glory gathered,
Sown at the Cross in lonely agony.

Of course, we know that even the Cross wasn't the starting point. The search takes us back beyond time into the mists of the eternal past and God's great purpose of the ages, *the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.*² With that thrilling thought we bow and wonder and worship as we contemplate what the Divine Co-coordinator has brought about. To God be the glory!

References: (1) Gen. 16:8 (2) Eph. 3:11
Bible quotations from NKJV

