

Needed Truth

A pattern for life in God's House

NT

Back to Basics

Heroes of faith
A beginner pressing on
The greatness of God
Making a marriage work

Issue 3 2010

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From the Editors' desk

The blend of maturity and vision



It's a pleasing feature of this issue, as with many others now, that younger writers are 'picking up their pens' alongside their more experienced counterparts. It's our prayer that this will be reflected in a readership which spans a wide age range too.

I was impressed with this aspect of things through reading 1 Chronicles 25:1-2,8. Buried among these lists of names are some significant spiritual 'gems'. It's there we read of how *the teacher as well as the pupil* were listed among *those who performed their service*. In fact, their duties were apportioned on the basis of their being *all alike*. The detailed lists bear this out with the names of younger men occasionally preceding the names of older. It was not a case of them being precocious or presumptuous, for this was all under *the direction of the king*. While God's Word teaches us to respect the wisdom of maturity in spiritual things, younger and older have a valued contribution to make, blended under the direction of our King in the service of His house on earth. Indeed, certain types of activity cry out for younger persons to take a lead with their energy, enthusiasm and vision.

I personally have been blessed by the writing of younger, newer contributors in this issue and would just like to take this opportunity to commend what they say to you.

It's good to have a feature from 'down under' which shows teachers and students of the Word interacting positively together with mutual blessing.

Talking of gems, as we were earlier, Andy, as he makes his way through Aaron's wardrobe, brings us some sparkling thoughts.

Two different generations combine forces to give us different slants on another fundamental of our faith: water baptism.

However, the distinction of being our youngest writer in this issue belongs to someone from the Far East, Geralde, but I'm sure even our more senior readers will praise God for the remarkable story he shares with us.

Brian

Facing our fears

When it's right to do nothing

by Edwin Stanley, Aberkenfig, Wales

When confronted with great difficulties, do you ever struggle to see which direction God wants you to follow?

God's will and purpose may seem to be shrouded in a veil; we begin to fret at the apparent lack of guidance in our particular circumstances or problems. That's so very far from the truth! The root of our difficulty is an impatience to see the resolution to the problem. Instead of being still and resting in God, we either try to resolve the issue ourselves – often with disastrous results – or we may descend into a state of depression and doubt.

Israel experienced this very soon after their escape from slavery in Egypt: *When Pharaoh drew near, the people of Israel lifted up their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them, and they feared greatly. And the people of Israel cried out to the LORD. "... it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness."* And Moses said to the people, *"Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be silent."*¹

This is one of the hardest things in the world: to stand firm – or still – when every fibre of our being strains to **do** something! Yet God knew where all of this was leading. He had the situation under control and He was not about to allow the recapture of His people. No, the way of escape lay before them, although they couldn't possibly see it, but it was learned through standing firm and waiting for God. Whilst Israel had to be still, they were not to be entirely inactive, for God tells them next to *"go forward"*.² This can literally mean to 'pull up the tent pegs'. They were to be ready to break camp, to do God's bidding, to be prepared to follow where God would lead them and not to attempt a fight for deliverance from their enemies.

Our evaluation of circumstances can be influenced very strongly by the world and its thinking. 'Pulling up the tent pegs' has a wonderful relevance to how our thoughts and actions should be uprooted from worldly considerations and instead be influenced and directed by God.

The people of Israel experienced deliverance in a way they could never have anticipated, as God



The people of Israel experienced deliverance in a way they could never have anticipated

miraculously parted the waters of the Red Sea and they were able to walk through on dry land. As they were *baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea*³ they were separated from their old life and led into service and worship.

As Christians we, too, have to know a similar separation.⁴ It becomes instrumental in shaping our thoughts heavenwards,⁵ indeed it transforms us to think differently⁶ under the influence of the Holy Spirit. For Israel, the sea, which had been such a problem, became a doorway into God's service. So it is with us in our trials and difficulties. Such things can be seen as hindrances or obstacles to our way of life: yet under God's sovereign will, they are revealed to be entrances to service, perhaps in ways that never entered our minds, even in our wildest dreams.

Many have had to learn the lesson of letting go of what was considered to be valuable or essential, in order that God's will and purpose for them might be revealed. The apostle Paul wrote, *But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him.*⁷

When we are willing to 'let go and let God' in this sense, the path of faith is displayed clearly for us through His Word, and we are enabled to serve in the way God wants us to.

Israel learned how different their lives could be; we may be surprised by the difference in our lives when we are calmly prepared for action, waiting on our God!

References: (1) Ex. 14:10-14 (2) Ex. 14:15 (3) 1 Cor. 10:2 (4) Rom. 6 (5) Col.3:1-10 (6) Rom. 12 (7) Phil. 3:7-9

Bible quotations from ESV

The greatness of God

A vision of glory

by Ronnie Magee, Cookstown, N. Ireland

Isaiah records the vision he had of the Lord when he visited the temple one day.¹ This experience affected him in such a way that it changed his life. Why? Because he saw the sovereign and absolute Master of mankind in all His majesty and glory; the God he encountered was awesome.

God is great in His sovereignty and majesty

Isaiah's vision was one of sovereignty (*the Lord sitting on a throne*) and majesty (*high and lifted up*). God was reigning on the throne, supreme over the destinies of the nations, people and things – absolutely sovereign.

Jeremiah also extolled the greatness of God, who made the earth by His power, the world by His wisdom and the heavens by His understanding, seeing and controlling everything He had made, absolutely sovereign over the cosmos.² His knowledge, creative design, power and control revealed His all-powerful supremacy. However, when Job reviewed God's creation, he stated that *these are the mere edges of His ways*.³ Imagine – to describe God's accomplishments as the basic outlines of His activities must surely instil in us some awareness of the incomprehensible infinity of God.

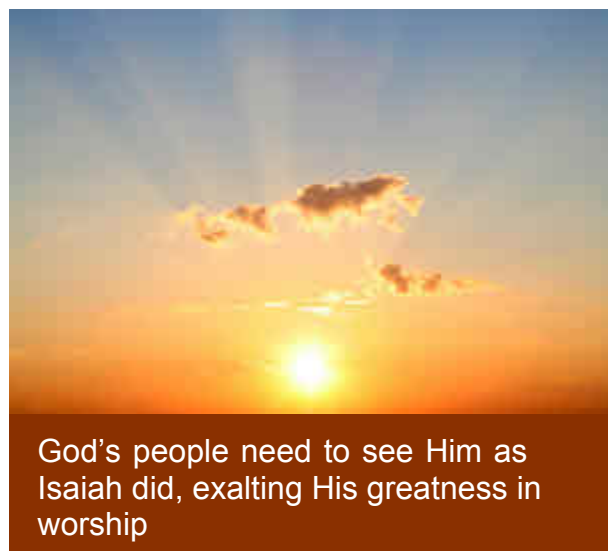
The greatness of God is also observed in the angelic beings standing above the throne. Isaiah describes how they utilise their six wings. Two of them cover their faces, suggesting that the sight of God on His majestic throne was too sacred and awesome to look upon. Another two covered their feet, indicating that they were unable to walk on the infinite glorious brightness surrounding the throne. The remaining two wings were used to fly (the normal purpose of wings) as God's messengers to perform His commands.

God is great in His holiness and glory

The angelic beings also proclaimed the holiness of God, which expresses the very excellence of His divine nature; the great God is *glorious in holiness*.⁴ As a perfect being, He is holy in His essence, He is infinitely removed from all evil – no person or thing in this universe, or beyond, can affect His holiness.

Hannah, Samuel's mother, included in her prayer to the Lord, "*No one is holy like the LORD, for there is none besides You.*"⁵ His holiness makes Him other than man – supreme and incomparable.

God's holiness is manifested in His works of nature and the creation of man, for He made everything



God's people need to see Him as Isaiah did, exalting His greatness in worship

according to the counsels of his own purity and wisdom, pronouncing that everything was very good.

The Scriptures amply display the holiness of God because they are the revelation of His holy mind on such subjects as His statutes, counsels, precepts, warnings and promises. But best of all, the atoning sacrifice at Calvary demonstrates His infinite holiness and abhorrence of sin. Habakkuk penned the words concerning the Lord, *You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on wickedness*,⁶ revealing the fact that God cannot regard sin with complacency or toleration. Today, God calls us with a holy calling, regenerating us and making us holy by giving us the Holy Spirit to guide us in the way of holiness.

God is great in His grace and mercy

The prophet Micah asked the question *Who is a God like You?*⁷ Who indeed! He is a great God who pardons sin, forgives transgressions and delights in showing mercy.

God's grace is great: we are saved by His grace. Divine grace is eternal, because it was planned before time began; it is free, no one could ever purchase it; and it is sovereign because God bestows it upon whom He pleases. Hence, God's throne is designated the throne of grace.

God's mercy is great to those who love Him, it is abundant to those who call upon Him and it is from everlasting on those who fear Him.

Today, when many references to God and so-called worship of Him are irreverent, God's people need to see Him as Isaiah did – majestic, sovereign, holy and great – exalting His greatness in worship.

References: (1) Isa. 6:1-7 (2) Jer. 10:10-16 (3) Job 26:14 (4) Ex. 15:11 (5) 1 Sam. 2:2 (6) Hab. 1:13 (7) Mic. 7:18.

Bible quotations from NKJV.

HEROES OF FAITH

Joseph Shaped by hardship

by Lennie Shaw, Kilmarnock, Scotland

Joseph was someone who could see the bigger picture ...

Rejected by his own family, sold as a slave, falsely accused, imprisoned and then forgotten by a man whose dream he had interpreted, he knew God wasn't finished with him. He remembered the God-given dreams for which his brothers hated him. He knew God remembered too and he took God at His word.¹

How often do we hear that God's timing is not the same as our own? It took thirteen years of slavery and imprisonment in Egypt before Joseph reached the position for which God was preparing him. Which of us would have had the faith to endure all that he did during that time? He must have clung to

those prophetic dreams during his darkest hours when it seemed that he was completely alone and even God had forgotten him. Of course God hadn't forgotten. These times of trial were meant to shape him to become the man who would ultimately occupy the most responsible position in the land.

Christians are not immune from trials and hardship, far from it – God still shapes us.

The day came when Joseph's brothers appeared before him to buy grain for their father's household. How easily he could have taken revenge for their treatment of him.

They themselves were still guilt-filled, their thoughts never far from



their actions against their own brother so long ago.² How often had they been haunted by what they had done to Joseph?

As they stood before him, did Joseph's mind go back to his own cries for help from the bottom of the pit as the brothers calmly ignored his distress? He now repaid their evil with mercy, and their betrayal with generosity. He had become the faithful man that God intended.

References: (1) Gen. 37:5-10
(2) Gen. 42:21-22

Moses Choosing and refusing

by Ira Williamson, Buxton, England

By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God (Heb. 11:24-25 NASB).

Progressing from a foundation of faith, Moses grew up, refused certain things and chose others. He evaluated the present based on a vision of the future. A life of faith and spiritual growth consists of the things we refuse, and the things we choose.

Growing old is not the same as growing up. I once saw a beautiful bald eagle confined to a bird sanctuary. It was a magnificent looking bird, until it stretched out its wings and revealed a disfigurement caused by malnutrition that made flight impossible. How sad to see something designed for soaring in

the heights restricted to hopping in the dust because it didn't 'grow up' properly!

Moses refused Egypt's honours. He surely could have had his name for all time recorded in the locked code of Egyptian hieroglyphs, but Moses chose eternal over temporary, incorruptible over corruptible, and spiritual over carnal. He refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. Identity is almost as much about what we choose not to be, as it is about what we choose to be.

Moses chose to be mistreated with the people of God. Growing up brings choices. Going with the flow may be easier for a time, but it produces no strength for when difficult choices need to be made. Moses' choice would not have been one 'BIG' decision, but rather a process of learning, making small choices, taking little steps that



eventually led him to this place where he felt the unity of his calling with his brothers and sisters by blood above those associated with him by circumstance. For the baby lifted from the Nile, blood was definitely thicker than water. He really was one from among the people of God, and chose to be mistreated along with them. Such a choice could only be made by one who had truly 'grown up.'

With the goal God lays out for us to achieve in Ephesians 4:13, we all have some growing up to do on the basis of our faith. What things are you currently facing which you need to refuse? What choices are yours? Follow Moses' soaring example of looking ahead by faith.

BACK TO BASICS

In the water

Baptism of believers

by Alex Reid, Leigh, England

How should we baptize?

All Christians agree that the medium of physical baptism should be water. However, they are not unanimous about how the ordinance should be carried out. All of the following modes are practised: sprinkling with water, pouring water upon, or complete immersion in water.

Firstly, we need to grasp the meaning of the original Greek word for baptism. W.E. Vine says: *Baptizo: to baptize, primarily a frequentative form of bapto, to dip, was used among the Greeks to signify the dyeing of a garment, or the drawing of water by dipping a vessel into another, etc.*¹

The thought, then, is dipping into, not sprinkling or pouring upon.

Secondly, the New Testament descriptions of baptism portray the one being baptized as going down into and coming up out of the water. For example, *Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. Immediately coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opening.*² Also, in Acts 8:38, *they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away.*

Thirdly, the Scriptures tell us what baptism is meant to symbolize: *Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection.*³ Only baptism by immersion is consistent with the symbol of death and resurrection.

Opponents of immersion may try to dispute the impact of these individual points, but, when combined, they show that immersion is the only mode that fully meets New Testament criteria for the ordinance of baptism.



Immersion is the only mode that fully meets New Testament criteria for the ordinance of baptism

Whom should we baptize?

Answers to this question fall into two main groupings; those who would baptize infants, usually by sprinkling or pouring, and those who would baptize only those professing faith in Christ, usually by immersion, generally called believer's baptism.

Those who would sanction the baptism of infants lay emphasis on the faith of the parents or godparents who put the child forward for baptism; whereas with believer's baptism it is the faith of the individual seeking baptism that is emphasized.

There is no record in the New Testament of infants being baptized. Those who would argue such a case suggest that there must have been children among the household members mentioned in Acts 10:24,48 and 16:31,33 at the conversions of Cornelius and the jailer of Philippi respectively, and in the household of Stephanas mentioned in 1 Corinthians 1:16. This is a very weak argument as it rests on supposition rather than stated fact. Moreover, 1 Corinthians 16:15-17 indicates that the 'household' of Stephanas were adult enough to devote themselves in Christian service, and in the other instances it is evident that all who were baptized had the capacity to listen to preaching and respond.⁴

Another line of argument adopted in support of baptizing children is one which argues from analogy. For example, from 1 Corinthians 10:1-2 it is argued that there must have been infants among the people of Israel who were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, therefore infants can be baptized. Although analogies are often useful

in illustrating a point, they can mislead and are not solid ground on which to base an argument. There is not much logic in this analogy: it is only people who are capable of making a rational decision who are to be baptized. Otherwise, what about Israel's flocks and herds?

The above arguments plus others are used to try to justify infant baptism, but in Acts 2:41 it is stated: *So then, those who had received his word* (Peter's preaching of Christ) *were baptized*. The same pattern of belief first, then baptism, is repeated in the case of the Ethiopian eunuch of Acts 8:34-39; of the centurion Cornelius of Acts 10 and the jailer of Philippi in Acts 16:31-34. In all these cases personal faith in Christ was exercised by the individual concerned before being baptized, something that could not be expected of a babe in arms.

Is baptism necessary for salvation?

Certain scriptures are put forward to support the idea that baptism is a necessary act in receiving eternal salvation, and we shall deal with some of them shortly. First we need to establish an important principle: the New Testament clearly teaches that the forgiveness of sins and eternal life are obtained through faith alone. The following references should be sufficient to establish the point: John 1:12; 5:24; Acts 10:43; 16:31; Romans 1:16-17; 5:1; 10:9 and Ephesians 2:8-9. If personal salvation from the penalty of sin is the product of faith alone, then any scripture linking baptism and salvation must be either an exceptional case, or refer to a different aspect of salvation.

The closest thing we have to an explanation of baptism is found in 1 Peter 3:20-21. *The patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water* [or *were saved through water* NKJV]. *Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you – not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience – through the resurrection of Jesus Christ*. When reading verses that use the words 'saved' or 'salvation', it is always a sound idea to ask, saved from what? The water, if understood as the means of salvation here, did not deliver Noah from judgement (which was the function of the ark), but delivered him and his family from the evil generation among whom they had lived. Likewise a believer in his or her baptism is declaring that he has died to sin and is beginning to walk in newness of life⁵ on the basis of a good conscience towards God which acts to deliver him or her from former sinful associations.

There are other verses that are often put forward in an attempt to support the contention that baptism is necessary for eternal salvation. For example, *He who has believed and has been baptized shall be*

saved.⁶ This verse might be understood in the light of what has been said above: that belief or faith alone delivers from the penalty of sin, and baptism is a declaration of intent that we should be delivered from a worldly way of life. Or certainly it could be pointed out (from the continuation of the same verse: *he who has disbelieved shall be condemned*) that disbelief alone results in condemnation, which indicates that belief alone brings salvation, and baptism is the public confession of that true faith.

*Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.*⁷ This is a verse often quoted in support of the idea of baptismal regeneration, which teaches that baptism is the means of spiritual rebirth. In the light of other scriptures that clearly teach the cleansing from sin through the blood of Christ,⁸ it is necessary to understand this invitation to the newly converted Saul as an exhortation to put away his former manner of life and to take up the task for which the Lord had called him.

*Peter said to them, 'Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins'*⁹ would seem to be the exception to the line of exposition followed so far, and so needs to be understood in the context in which it was spoken. These words were proclaimed on the day of Pentecost, in the city of Jerusalem, to the same populace that a few weeks previously had bayed for the blood of the Lord. Theirs ('the house of Israel', v.36) was a special culpability in the condemning to death of the Son of God. From them, therefore, an exceptional test was required; namely, that to experience forgiveness of sin they must not only repent and believe in Jesus as the Christ, but also make a very public acknowledgement of their commitment to Jesus Christ as their Lord and master.

Conclusion

The teaching of the New Testament is that believers in Jesus Christ should be baptized by immersion in water as a symbol of what has already happened to them spiritually and as a public declaration that they are followers of the Lord Jesus, and as such have put away their former manner of life.

References: (1) Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old & New Testament Words (2) Mark 1:9-10 (3) Rom. 6:4-5 (4) Acts 10:44; 16:32,34 (5) see Rom. 6:3-6 (6) Mark 16:16 (7) Acts 22:16 (8) e.g. 1 John 1:7-9; Heb. 9:14 (9) Acts 2:38

Bible quotations from NASB

BACK TO BASICS

Walking in newness of life Learning to walk after the new birth

by Stephen Hickling, Birmingham, England

Baptisms are always special occasions, but what I particularly like about them is the profound, yet clear, imagery of the believer going down into the water and then being raised out of it. The symbolism of death, burial and resurrection is so plain. You cannot fail to be struck by its powerful testimony to the dramatic event which has already taken place in that believer's life as a result of his placing faith in the Lord Jesus Christ: he has died with Christ to sin and has been made alive in Christ to God!

Baptisms also serve as welcome reminders to those of us who have been baptized of the important commitment we made to the Lord Jesus when we were united with Him in the likeness of His death and resurrection at our own baptism. The very public declaration of our being lifted out of the baptismal waters was that we had already made a new start; and now from this baptismal day until the Lord returns for us, we would walk in newness of life.

*Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.*¹

The reality of the new life

The language of Romans 6:4 corresponds with the words of the popular chorus,

I am a new creation,
No more in condemnation
Here in the grace of God I stand. (Dave Bilbrough)

The 'newness of life' now to be displayed in the walk of the baptized disciple can be expected

on the basis that he is already a 'new creation'.

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.*²

The reality of the new birth is that God has not simply repaired or mended us; rather, He has started again and created us anew! The change that takes place at the moment of the sinner's conversion is so radical, so complete and so permanent, that the hand of the great Creator is as evident in this work as it was when He first created the heavens and the earth!

The use of the word 'newness' in Romans 6:4 is emphatic; newness is the prominent theme in the apostle's mind. 'Newness' (and indeed the word for 'new' in 2 Corinthians 5:17) does not simply refer to something that is new in time (i.e. recent or young), but new in quality or character. It implies that this new creation, or life, is completely different in character from anything that existed previously. The old things of the old creation have passed away and have been replaced with new desires, new motives, new principles, new purposes and a new direction. Indeed, for the believer, all things have become new!

In Ephesians 4:24 you find an equivalent expression to the 'new creation' of 2 Corinthians 5: *the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.*³

No wonder this new nature can be described as fresh in quality and character by comparison with



Walking is all about showing the reality of the change that God has made at our conversion

what it has replaced: the new man has been created in the likeness of God! By contrast, our old nature (the old man) which was done away with prior to the creation within us of the new nature, takes its likeness from Adam. The old man *grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts*;⁴ the new man is continually being *renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him.*⁵ What a difference!

Interestingly, in Colossians 3:10 the word for 'new' does simply mean new in relation to time. In the context of that verse, it seems to be indicative of the fact that this process of knowledge renewal into the image of the Creator is one which has only just begun. So far as that process, which will engage our eternal lives, is concerned, it's early days for the new man!

Walking – developing good behaviour

Those of us who are parents will be familiar with the happiness that comes from a child taking his or her first steps. For the child, the frustration of those initial wobbles

and falls is soon replaced, by repeated practice, with the assurance of balanced technique. The transition from baby to toddler is, of course, a vitally important one for the physical development of a child. It is no less significant in the development of the child of God that he learn to walk, after his spiritual rebirth, in order to experience the fullness of his new life.

W.E. Vine tells us that the word for 'walk' in Romans 6:4 'signifies the whole round of activities of the individual life'.⁶ Literally, the word means to walk 'all around'; a very public promenade to display our new-found ability.

Walking in the context of Romans 6:4 is all about our behaviour. It's about our showing outwardly (all around) the reality of the change that God has made inwardly at our conversion. At our salvation we received a new spiritual life; at our baptism we publicly declared that we had already died to sin in order that we might thereafter walk in the freshness of that new life.

It would be wrong to think that this matter of walking is something to be mastered by the new Christian and then forgotten. On the contrary, our baptism merely displayed an initial willingness to be subject to the Lord. Is that obedient spirit still recognisable in our present walk? Can others observe in us the evidence of God-given freshness and vitality?

The only other use of the word 'newness' in the New Testament is in the very next chapter of Romans. In a very similar expression to the one we have considered in Romans 6:4, Paul tells us that we *serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter*.⁷

What a gracious God we serve! Not only has God thoroughly regenerated us, but He has given us the grace by which we might serve Him in keeping with that new life through the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. The only way it's possible for a newness of walk to be seen in us is because the Spirit makes it so. The contrast: living according to the flesh or walking in newness of life.

When you consider the magnitude of the change that God has made in the believer, you quickly realise that it's simply unthinkable for him to continue to lead a life dominated by sin. Yet, Paul's exhortation in Romans 6:12 implies that this remains a real

possibility for the believer: *Do not let sin reign in your mortal body.*

Paul tells the Colossian saints that they *laid aside the old self with its evil practices, and have put on the new self*.⁸ These verses tell of the reality of the divine work in believers on the Lord Jesus. This is the eternal perspective.

The problem is that, whilst in the body, we have still to contend with the old self, which resides there. That's the present struggle that Paul refers to when he addresses the Ephesian saints in regard to their conduct. *[You] have been taught by Him... that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness*.⁹

The teaching in Ephesians 4 is that we must take positive action, so far as our conduct is concerned, to ensure that our walk evidences what God has established. We have to clothe ourselves with the new man, but that is only possible if we've first taken off the old man. In His grace and patience, God does not compel us in our decision as to how we will walk. But whenever we decide to put off the old, the Spirit is ready to empower a walk characterised by newness of life.

The key to walking daily in newness of life is to have a proper appreciation of our death! Think back to the day of your baptism and recall how you identified yourself with the death of God's Son. We will never experience the fullness and freshness of living with Him until we appreciate that we died with Him.

Knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin.¹⁰

References: (1) Rom. 6:4 (2) 2 Cor. 5:17 NKJV (3) Eph. 4:24 NKJV (4) Eph. 4:22 NKJV (5) Col. 3:10, NKJV (6) Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old & New Testament Words (7) Rom. 7:6 (8) Col. 3:9-10 (9) Eph. 4:21-24 NKJV (10) Rom. 6:6-7

Bible quotations from NASU unless otherwise stated

STUDY FEATURE



1. Which of the presented arguments is clearest for you regarding a) baptism being intended to be by immersion; and b) baptism not being necessary for salvation?
2. Does baptism symbolize our recognition that Christ died for us or our recognition that we died with Him?
3. What practical difference has being baptized made in your life?

Making a marriage work

Encouragement and forgiveness

by David Webster, Liverpool, England

“My wife can’t cook.” “My husband is useless around the house!” “You never listen to a word I say!” Harsh words, criticism and telling it as it is, even if dressed up as honesty or straight talking, are words that tend to pull down rather than build up, aren’t they? It is not a great idea to ‘put down’ your spouse or to insist on having the last word or to stress the things that he or she is not good at. The Bible tells us that *the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Saviour.*¹ And this thought is developed in the following verses. Stop and reflect on that for a moment! Love her, care for her, look after her interests in the way that the Lord Jesus looks after the interests of the church! That rules out those harsh words,² an uncaring attitude³ or a discouraging put-down as both husbands and wives are commanded to respect each other.⁴

In our world of corporate *Have Your Say* schemes people are more likely to make a complaint than to issue a compliment. We are more likely to make a fuss when we are treated discourteously than we are to return to say thanks for a good job well done! But it does not have to be like that in a Christian marriage. Sometimes all that is needed is the assurance of encouragement. “That was good,” or “I’m glad you thought of that,” doesn’t cost anything, but can mean so much.

And when it comes to our service for the Lord, husbands and wives can play a key role in encouraging each other not to give up or choose the wrong options. We can pray together, for each other, for our families and friends and our church and that really focuses us on what is important.

But what about those times when things go wrong? *Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you*⁵ is the general principle. A simple “sorry” is often all that is required between a couple who love and care for each other. If the hurt is



Husbands and wives can play a key role in encouraging each other not to give up or choose the wrong options

deeper it may mean talking through the situation to explain why you feel let down, but above all the Lord’s instruction is, *Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.*⁶ That means sorting out what has come between you and starting each day without yesterday’s anger smouldering away – even if it means eating humble pie!

Practising what these two Scriptures teach:

- (1) We overlook the little things and let them go as unimportant, both of us ‘bearing with’ and forgiving all the time.
- (2) When we do have to consciously forgive, we remember how much God has forgiven us and suddenly the ‘grievance’ loses some of its sting. A forgiven couple must always be forgiving to each other!
- (3) We never carry over hurts to fight again the next day – that is the way to spoil a marriage and invites disaster into our relationship.
- (4) We remain alert that the Adversary is seeking to undermine our marriage and we do not let him get anything to latch on to.

Holding grudges and finding fault may be human traits, but forgiving and encouraging is God’s way. Marriage is God’s idea and it always works better when, together, we operate it God’s way.

References: (1) Eph. 5:23 (2) see Col. 3:19 (3) See 1 Cor. 7:33 (4) see 1 Pet. 3:7 & Eph. 5:33 (5) Col. 3:13 (6) Eph. 4:26-27

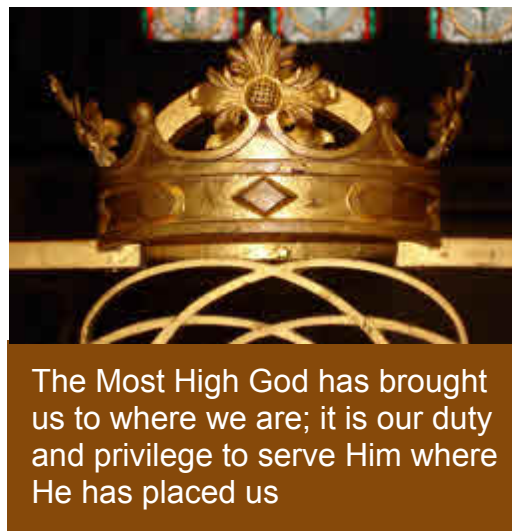
Bible quotations from NIV

The Most High rules God-given governments

by Peter Hickling, Cromer, England

Scripture records how the great king Nebuchadnezzar boasted about his exploits and his power; *“Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?”*¹ He had been warned about the consequences of his arrogance by the prophet Daniel, in interpreting his dream: *“... break off your sins by practising righteousness, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed, that there may perhaps be a lengthening of your prosperity.”*² However, he ignored the warning, and immediately after his boast *there fell a voice from heaven, “O King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: The kingdom has departed from you, and you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. And you shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and seven periods of time shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will.”*³ Straight away the thing happened, and the great ruler was treated like a farm animal; when he recovered he had to say, *I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, for all his works are right and his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to humble.*⁴

The point in relating this is that a new coalition government has just taken power in Britain, and we may wonder what it will be like. Seeing that of late the state machinery and the media in the UK have seemed to be anti-Christian in a number of ways, will the new government be any different? From what we have heard so far, the news is mixed. On the one hand, a keynote word is ‘responsibility’, and the Conservative part of the coalition, at least, seeks to encourage the married family. On the other, party leaders look favourably on same-sex partnerships, and some people seem to be more afraid of offending Muslims than offending Christians. However, we have to accept what Nebuchadnezzar learned, that *the Most High rules the kingdom of men, and gives it to whom he will*. This is reiterated in the



The Most High God has brought us to where we are; it is our duty and privilege to serve Him where He has placed us

New Testament: *Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.*⁵ Therefore Christians should obey the law, unless they are required to do something against the law of God – Peter and the apostles, ordered not to preach in the name of Jesus, said *“We must obey God rather than men.”*⁶ We should be thankful that Christians in Britain do not have to face overt persecution, oppression or threats because of their faith and we should pray for those who do. Some of our brothers and sisters in Churches of God live in countries where the government or the dominant religion threatens them in various ways – there have been recent examples of this – and we should pray for God’s overruling for their protection. We cannot be specific in this magazine, because it circulates in these countries, and we have no desire to inflame opposition against the people concerned, but we can pray to the God who knows.

It is very likely that we face economically hard times, compared with the recent past, since the consequences of excessive debt, both public and private, will have to be faced, but those in most western countries should remind themselves that to many fellow Christians they seem very rich, and should be thankful to God for His blessing. The Lord Jesus said, *“... one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”*⁷ The Most High God has brought us to where we are; it is our duty and privilege to serve Him where He has placed us.

References: (1) Dan. 4:30 (2) Dan. 4:27 (3) Dan. 4:31-32 (4) Dan. 4:37 (5) Rom. 13:1 (6) Acts 5:29 (7) Luke 12:15

Bible quotations from ESV

Garments for glory

The breastplate

by Andy McIlree, Greenock, Scotland

Exodus 28:15-16, 21-29

It is apparent in our study of these priestly garments that, until now, something is missing. There are no pockets. Our clothes have them because we have so many items to carry around, but Aaron never had this problem. There was no room for selfish luxuries in holy garments or for anything that would detract from their glory and beauty. God had planned that nothing would cater for self or the flesh or cause an undignified figure to walk among His people with idle hands in his pockets. So he had none until God gave him one in the form of the breastplate. The Hebrew word suggests it was a pocket-like container, but it also indicates its character for it means to sparkle or to be rich. As it was placed on Aaron, a sudden change came over his garments, as if they sparkled and were enriched by the heart of God being represented on the heart of His servant. The coat and the robe have pointed us to the righteousness and heavenliness of Christ, but without the riches of the breastplate these are obscured. With it, they became part of the overall revelation of His heart from which neither righteousness nor heavenliness can be removed.

Aaron was an ordinary man who needed the breastplate to give him largeness of heart. When it was secured on his chest, he instinctively knew that this part of his garments emphasised how utterly dependent he was upon God and that he was now in possession of something that gave him a heart for the people of God. His garments equipped him to stand in the divine presence, but until he was given the breastplate he was not equipped to stand in the presence of the people or show that he had a heart for all of them without exception. Now he had a readiness that allowed each person to see their own tribe's stone on it and say with assurance, "He is standing there for me."

When King Solomon was given *largeness of heart*, it was described as being *like the sand on the seashore*.¹ God had asked, "What shall I give you?" and Solomon



It was worn on Aaron's breast as a weight on his heart, not on his head as a weight on his mind

Picture taken from a painting by Norman Miller. Used with permission

replied, "Give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people,"² for he knew that no one with a small heart could look after them. It is still the same in local church life: we cannot relate to each other unless we have largeness of heart, so it is a meaningful example where *Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand by the sea in multitude*.³ Immediately, we see the point: Solomon had a heart for Judah and Israel, capable of taking them all in. As king he was able to minister to the twelve tribes, and this is what the breastplate enabled Aaron to do as high priest.

Significantly, it is described as 'the breastplate of judgment'. Had it been called the breastplate of blessing or encouragement, we would have understood, but it was associated with judgment because it would be the means of declaring the divine verdict on matters affecting God's people. It was His determination (Heb. *mishpat*), which is related to the word found in Genesis 18:25, "Shall not the Judge (Heb. *shaphat*) of all the earth do right?" The character of the breastplate brought the heart of the selfsame Judge within their reach, and no problem in the camp was too big for His heart to feel.

It was worn on Aaron's breast as a weight on his heart, not on his head as a weight on his mind, for the judgment of God should never be executed clinically, but affectionately, in view of winning those who are judged. The heart of Christ was being foreshown: the Saviour who longs for the reconciliation of the sinner is the great High Priest who longs for the restoration of the saint. His compassions

must reinforce that there is a road to recovery, a way back. The heart of our High Priest shows that responsible correction is a means to renewed communion, and judgment should never be applied in such a way as to suggest that the scope of His affection has been reduced.

Since God determined its shape, was there a purpose in making the breastplate square? Yes, He chose its shape because the man who wore it would become keenly aware of the 'foursquareness' of God. The altar of burnt offering was square. The golden altar was square. The Most Holy Place was square: in fact, it was a cube. Whether he was farthest out sacrificially at the copper altar, centrally in a supplicatory manner before the golden altar, or farthest in for sanctuary service within the veil, the people knew that he was appearing there for them, including them in the 'foursquareness' of God. The breastplate was the daily reminder. What a lesson for us! If our lives are centred on the heart of our great High Priest they will be in concert with the place where He serves. We will enjoy Him as our altar,⁴ as our Intercessor,⁵ and as our High Priest in the Most Holy Place; yet how often do we consider Him in His priestly work and thank Him for the confidence we have that He is there for us in our problems, our prayers, and in our praise?⁶ But how is God's 'foursquareness' measured? Its measure was the span. Instead of calling it half a cubit, this new measurement was introduced to depict that the measure of His hand is the measure of His heart, and that the outstretching of His heart is revealed in the outstretching of His hand. He shows no favouritism. What He was on the cross is equally true of what He is on the throne. All are upheld in His intercession. He shows no partiality, inequality or selectivity. He paid for each one, and He prays for each one! Finally, *in full assurance of faith*,⁷ we meet Him in the Most Holy Place with his hands extended to receive our worship.⁸ What a gracious unfolding of His immeasurable span!

The breastplate did not have a casual association with the garments. God commanded that they should bind it using three methods: rings of gold, braided chains, and a blue cord, all divinely commissioned. The man who formed the rings was unaware that, in keeping with God's broader revelation through His Word, His people were to walk hand-in-hand with Him, like the bride who

described her beloved's hands as *rings of gold*.⁹ Encircled by him!

The chains were intertwined like a rope. When He said, "*I drew them ... with bands* (Heb. '*aboth*) of love,'"¹⁰ He used the same expression as the 'braided' (Heb. '*aboth*) chains (Heb. *sharshah*), a word closely related and applied to the Lord as the 'Root' (Heb. *sheresh*) of Jesse.¹¹ As the chains united the heart and shoulders, they allowed God's people to sense that they were rooted in the affections and strength of their high priest: ringed and rooted there. How then could their lives fail to sparkle? We take the lesson to ourselves and wonder how lives that are bound to Christ, *rooted and grounded in love*,¹² could ever become dull.

Finally, it was fastened by the blue cord, which was like a river flowing from the place of affection to the place of strength, blending the affection of His strength and the strength of His affection. Throughout our Bible, God shows that the strength of Christ is never separated from His affection and that the affections of Christ are a revelation of His strength.¹³ He revealed this while He was on earth and, because He is God manifested in the flesh, He is still the same in heaven with the same span measuring the same heart. Our strong and loving Saviour has become our equally strong and loving great High Priest, with His greatness revealed in both.

The breastplate was no short-term provision. Worn continually, it reminded the people that they had a constant refuge in God. In the Hebrew language, the word *tamiyd* ('continually') means to stretch. How significant! It is the thought of being constant, indicating that the measure of the outspread span was constantly stretched before Him. What a beautiful picture this is of the One who came to be stretched on the cross now stretching Himself, as it were, to make the glories of His priestly work available to us, that we might draw all the necessary resources from His pocket, not spasmodically, but continually.

References: (1) 1 Kin. 4:29 (2) 1 Kin. 3:5,9 (3) 1 Kin. 4:20 (4) Heb. 13:10 (5) Rom. 8:34 (6) Heb. 4:15,16; 10:19 (7) Heb. 10:22 (8) Heb. 8:3; 1 Pet. 2:5 (9) Song of Songs 5:14, RV (10) Hos. 11:4 (11) Isa. 11:10 (12) Eph. 3:17 (13) Ps. 147:3-5; Is. 40:11,12; 63:1,7; Ps. 63:2,3; John 11:36,43; 13:1,3

Bible quotations from NKJV

A beginner pressing on

An interview with Geralde Magusara of Tagum City, Philippines

Hi Geralde, tell our readers a little about yourself

I am the eldest son among five children. I am 23 years old. I am studying in 3rd year college – a year to go to obtain the Bachelor of Secondary Education degree. I live in Purok Buli, Visayan Village, Tagum City, Philippines.

During your teenage years did you have a settled life at home?

No, there was conflict. At 13, I was influenced by my friends to drink alcohol to excess and to take marijuana. My dad preached against these evils, but I rebelled. This caused me to leave home and go to a place where I had no friends or relatives. I experienced 3 nights sleeping on the streets without food. One afternoon, I sat down, crying and starving. A lady approached me and realizing my hunger she took me to her house and ‘adopted’ me. Three months later, someone reported to my parents that I was in Maco, Comval Province. So my mum came to collect me. A week later, I left home again. A friend introduced me to the New People’s Army (NPA). They taught me the doctrine of communism and invited me to join them. Their teaching seemed good – no poor, no rich, all equal, but, I refused because of the killings they were involved in. I was there when they shot a man who stole a chicken. I knew deep within that was wrong, a sin. I wondered why they didn’t consider it a sin when they stole a big caribou the following evening. Nine months later, I returned home. My parents were glad, but I set a condition: if they rebuked me for my vices, I would leave again.

How did you come to faith in Christ?

The person God used belonged to the ‘God’s Message’ congregation. I was baptized with them at camp when I was 15. I began preaching the gospel to my friends. One Sunday afternoon, near home, a friend of mine gave me a glass of fortified wine. The one who’d led me to Christ now told me I’d lost my salvation. So, I stopped praying and attending and became a backslider. I said to myself, “Well, if my salvation is lost, why not drink? I’ve no more hope of heaven! Do what you want, Geralde.” Things got worse. Can you believe it – when I got drunk I used to preach to my fellow drunks? Can you imagine someone stoning his own family’s house because his parents had scolded him? I did that!



When I got drunk I used to preach to my fellow drunks

And how did you come to hear about the churches of God?

Back in 2004, one evening at Eagle’s View Hotel in Tagum City, I attended a seminar conducted by Brian Johnston and Brian Tugwell. Brian J quoted the truth of John 10:27-29 that “once we are saved, we’ll never lose it again!” and followed up with 1 Corinthians 3:15. I became assured of the truth of salvation by faith alone.¹ Brian T illustrated John 1:12 by saying that when a human father has a naughty son, even though he may wish to disown him, he cannot change the reality of the situation that he is still his son – I discovered it’s like that with our heavenly Father! Once we become His children, through faith, we are ALWAYS His, although sometimes we make great mistakes! He’s ready to forgive us when we confess our sins.² These talks that evening warmed up my spirit to turn back to God.

What convinced you to serve God there (there’s plenty of choice in the Philippines!)?

My dad had received literature from UK. I happened to pick up one of them entitled ‘Ye that are Christ’s’ by Guy Jarvie. I began to study the Bible seriously for the first time. The truth of the House of God, which is all the churches of God together, gripped me and I wanted to serve God in it. How sad, many of God’s children today do not belong to it! I also found the truth, through this book, that ‘one-man ministry’ is not the teaching of Scripture. All men have freedom to speak His word.³ Head covering for women and keeping silent in church are truths I saw taught very clearly in the Bible.⁴ A year later, I was added to the Church of God in Tagum.

Seven months later, I finished translating ‘Ye that Are Christ’s’ into our own Cebuano dialect. I thank God it has made a big contribution for many in Liguyon who through it were established in their faith and desire to have a place in God’s house.

Students usually have a bit of spare time – how do you spend yours? What really excites you?

Yes, I have a bit of spare time – from Friday afternoon to Sunday. I spend it in spreading the Gospel in different places like Calinan, Davao, and Agusan. I often visit different newly planted churches of God like Liguyon, Montevista and Banaybanay. The ‘cross’ is what really excites me and is why I am doing this. I didn’t value myself before, but my soul was very precious to my Creator. This is my goal – reaching unsaved souls for Christ, because they, too, are precious to Him; then to disclose the truth to them that each believer has eternal security; and then to teach them about the house of God. Many churchgoers here do not know they are saved for ever at conversion and don’t discover God’s house on earth.

I understand you’ve faced some setbacks – disappointments and dangers. Tell us a little about them and how by God’s help you overcame ...

Last year, I received a death-threat by someone who at that time was a brother in the church. I fled to Tagibo, my grandmother’s place. There, he texted me early in the morning, “I’m here now in Tagum, watch your step. I will bury a bullet in your head.” I wondered how it could be that when I was ‘in Adam’ nobody threatened me like this; but once I was ‘in Christ’ it happened! I couldn’t imagine someone who professed to be my brother ‘in Christ’, but could speak like this to me! My human nature mourned to God, but His Word comforted me through James, *My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.*⁵ Through the prayers offered by the Churches of God (see Acts 12), two weeks later, that man embraced me tightly with tears and I accepted his apology.

You went on a training course run by the Churches of God in India. Please describe your feelings and experience for our readers, including what it meant to fellowship with Indian brothers and sisters ...

Whatever God says, He means it. ‘*Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know.*’⁶ I

was not expecting to experience travel to other nations. I never dreamt of it. However, God is rich and faithful to His words. It was my first time to ride an airplane when I left on May 2008 to go to India. There I met friendly Indians as well as experiencing their culture. Their spicy food was good for me. During Lord’s Day, women sat separately from the men. On the next day the training began, and I’m thankful to God for His servants Andy and Phil who taught us from the letter to Hebrews. One of the precious lessons I learned was the truth of Hebrews 12:22-24. How wonderful the privilege we have each week of rising in spirit into heaven in our worship at the Breaking of the Bread! It’s worth holding fast our hope within God’s house because of this.⁷

What are your ambitions in life?

During my teenage years my ambition was to become a civil engineer. Then it changed to wanting to become a nurse. However, that was not God’s plan. His plan for me is to take the Education degree. There’s one thing I desire when I finish this – *to be diligent to present yourself APPROVED TO GOD, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*⁸ For me, that means that if it’s God’s will, I want to be a full-time worker for Him, a servant for His house – for better or worse for me.

Finally, have you any message for youth in our churches around the world?

To my fellow youth in the Churches of God around the world, regardless of your position and achievement in life, one thing I can share with you is: always consider yourself a beginner. When my uncle taught me how to drive the car, as a beginner, every day I had an appetite to read the manual, was excited to ride according to his instruction, and had a zeal to wash it. He reprimanded me when I got wrong, but I pressed on toward my goal to learn how to drive and I achieved it. Our journey to press on to serve Him asks of us an appetite to read the Bible,⁹ excitement to be instructed by His will,¹⁰ and zeal to wash our sins every day through His Word.¹¹ He is there to lift us up if we stumble in disappointment.¹² Continue to *press toward the goal for the prize ...*¹³

References: (1) Eph. 2:8,9 (2) 1 John 1:9 (3) 1 Cor. 14:31 (4) 1 Cor. 11:6; 14:34 (5) Jas. 1:2 (6) Jer. 33:3 (7) Heb. 3:6; 6:19-20 (8) 2 Tim. 2:15 (9) 2 Tim. 3:16 (10) Rom. 12:2 (11) Ps. 119:9 (12) 1 Pet. 5:7 (13) Phil. 3:14

Bible quotations from NKJV

Youth-focused

by Ron Busby, Melbourne, Australia

The Lord Jesus was most sympathetic to young children in His rebuke to the disciples when they wished them to go away. *“Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven.”*¹ He showed exceptional kindness and tenderness to them and their mothers, while using them as an example of the attitude of those entering the kingdom.

The young are our hope for the future in any church. As older, faithful Christians pass on, there needs to be a generation following to maintain church testimony. It is an important desire to attract and keep them against all the popular pursuits on offer. That is the challenge and, with the Lord’s help, it is possible.

In the Church of God in Melbourne, Australia, we are most conscious of such challenges and have channelled our outreach into this area. We hold two weekly youth groups, one for those under 12 years old (Live Wire) and a teen group – FNA (Friday Night Alive). The Live Wire club enjoys games, Bible stories and supper. These children then move into the FNA group once they start attending high school. With great anticipation and eagerness, the younger ones approach the time of their promotion into FNA.

The year 2010 marks 10 years since the inception of ‘Live Wire’ and ‘FNA’. This form of outreach was developed both for those connected with the church and for those with no church affiliations whatsoever. The work to date has resulted in six teenagers stepping forward to follow the Lord after receiving Christ. They have been baptized and added to the Church of God in Melbourne. This has happened over the last five years. It has been very encouraging to see the Lord at work with one sowing and another reaping as we all play a part in being used by the Lord to reach out to others. It reminds us of the apostle Paul who wrote, *I planted, Apollos watered.*²

The programme for the teenagers is a fun hour of games and activities in which we previously were very blessed to have a basketball hall to allow as much room to run around in as is needed. Then there is a supertime in which refreshments are supplied free of charge. Afterwards there is a Bible study for about an hour. This is a great time in which a subject is presented for approximately 15 minutes during which all the teenagers take turns to read two or three verses of the Bible portion. They really enjoy this and it helps them to



concentrate and learn at the same time. One rule we have in both groups is when looking up the Bible there is to be ‘no page number’ or ‘index-looking’ unless absolutely necessary. This helps them to get familiar with the Scriptures, and learn where all the books of the Bible are to be found. Afterwards, there is a questionnaire and discussion on the subject in which all are encouraged to give their opinions and to ask questions. Sometimes the discussions have lasted for up to one-and-a-half hours and have had to be brought to a conclusion because it was getting late!

Our FNA group is now made up primarily of mature teenagers who still love to read round and have lively discussions afterwards. We now hold these classes in our church hall, as they prefer the cosiness and enjoyment of their own environment where they can also enjoy table tennis, snooker and chatting.

One of the pleasing things we discovered was they are a very close-knit group and look out for each other in many ways including spiritually. They are all close friends and do many activities together outside their church life. This helps them encourage each other to stay close to the Lord.

Teaching the Word to our young people is vital as we think of the scripture, *Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth.*³ Our emphasis is to ensure that every occasion is a worthwhile teaching session, and that they take something home with them that will encourage their spiritual growth.

Historically, the youth work of the Churches of God in Australia has consisted mainly of annual camps, which were our best forms of outreach. Unfortunately, due to falling numbers this activity has ceased in the last couple of years, although we have booked a three day camp from 26-29 December 2011 where our young people will now help to lead and be actively involved.

References: (1) Mat. 19:14 (2) 1 Cor. 3:6 (3) Ecc. 12:1

Bible quotations from NKJV