

NIT

A pattern for life
in God's House

David:

Lover of God

How do you respond to jealousy?

Studying the Bible with your heart

Not judging one another

Matthew's Christ

Issue 1 2014

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From the Editors' desk

A hundred years ago this year, the world was plunged into a conflict that would change it for ever. The world situation seems just as volatile in some ways – ‘in times like these’, as the old hymn says, ‘you need a Saviour’.

That Saviour is the focus of one of our new series in 2014, which takes a look at the way that the Christ is presented in each of the gospels. In this issue, Ed Neely reviews Matthew's Christ and he provides a very helpful introduction to what Matthew reveals.

Another introduction is provided in a series by Karl Smith, although much broader in scope. Karl explains how to study the Bible and we are sure that even those of you who are well-versed in the Scriptures will benefit from his instruction.

Instruction can come in various forms and in each issue we aim to bring an element of life experience from one of our readers that we can all learn from. This issue, we speak to Bryan Dougan – a successful businessman who was brought to the brink of financial ruin, but who found meaning and fresh purpose in re-devoting his life to the Lord.

Another regular feature of NT is the keynote subject with a practical article following a teaching piece. This year is no exception, and we return to the study of David and focus on his four loves – God, God's People, God's House and God's Word – and his four relationships, with Saul, Jonathan, Joab and his wives. Keith Dorricott and Greg Neely are our first contributors to this topic.

There's plenty more to engage your interest in this issue, including the first in a series of early heresies and a challenging article by Don Williamson on the practical obligation of grace. We look forward to sharing the truth of God's Word with you throughout the coming year.



Touch

Eric Willis, Liverpool, England

‘Please do not touch’ is a notice often seen on valuable objects or works of art in museums and stately homes. It is a timely warning that these objects can easily be damaged or soiled.

Imagine my surprise, then, to see on some hand-made furniture in a showroom the notice, ‘Please touch me’. Here was an invitation, not only to look and admire, but also to touch and to feel: to explore and appreciate more fully the craftsman’s skill with this fine piece of work.

Touch involves contact, and differs from hearing and seeing in at least two ways. The ear and the eye are distant receptors, and so able to receive and react to stimuli from sources which may be a considerable distance away. The sense of touch, on the other hand, responds to whatever is near. Also, whereas there are special receptor organs for the ear and the eye, every part of our body is sensitive to touch. Beneath the outer skin there are localized structures sensitive to touch. The hands especially play a very important part in the sensory experience of touch, in that they are capable of an enhanced sensitivity and awareness, for example seen in the skill of the surgeon or musician. A blind person is able to feel and read the tiny raised dots of the Braille script.

Helen Keller was a remarkable lady, stricken with a severe illness as a baby which left her totally blind and deaf. By means of touch, with her lively intelligence and the help of a dedicated teacher, she became a woman of great culture and spiritual insight. In her autobiography, ‘The Story of My Life’, she says, ‘the hands of those I meet are dumbly eloquent to me’. She expresses her faith in the words, ‘The Bible gives me a deep comforting sense that things seen are temporal and the things unseen are eternal.’

The Lord in His public ministry on earth often laid His hands upon – and so touched – those who were in need. In this He identified Himself with them and manifested His divine power to heal and to bless. His was a touch of love. A leper came, imploring Him, “*If You are willing, You can make me clean.*” Then Jesus, moved with compassion, stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, “*I am willing; be cleansed.*”¹ A man who was an outcast, an ‘untouchable’, was touched by the great compassionate Physician and cleansed. That touch is able to meet our needs today – His touch still has its ancient power!

A woman who had suffered an illness for twelve years, once came to the Lord and touched the hem of His cloak. She said, “*If only I may touch His garment, I shall be made well.*”² She had the touch of faith.



Jesus, moved with compassion, stretched out His hand and touched him

Thomas wanted the experience, not only of seeing the Lord, but, so that there would be no doubt of who He was, of being able to touch Him. *Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, “Peace to you!” Then He said to Thomas, “Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing.” And Thomas answered and said to Him. “My Lord and my God!”*³ John draws on similar experiences in the opening of his epistle, *That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life.*⁴

It is often said that in the modern world the personal touch is at times lacking. We despair, sometimes, on the telephone, when trying to respond to an automated voice message instead of being able to speak to someone personally. Sadly, at times we can also feel ‘out of touch’ with the Lord if we neglect those quiet times of meditation and prayer. The touched lips of service and witness are dependent on touched hearts of love and devotion. In our relationships with others it is easy sometimes to get out of touch because of the pressure of other things. Christian fellowship is something we should always cherish, a touch often speaks more than words to those in need.

Finally, we think of the joy and privilege we have of meeting together each Lord’s day to remember Him. We see and hear (and taste), but also take and touch those precious symbols of loaf and cup. May we know what it is to enter more fully into this deep spiritual experience.

References: (1) Mark 1:40-41 (2) Mat. 9:20-21 (3) John 20:26-28 (4) 1 John 1:1

Bible quotations from NKJV

David

Lover of God

Greg Neely, Toronto, Canada

When the Lord sent Samuel to Bethlehem to anoint a king to succeed Saul, He sent him to the family of Jesse among whose sons he would find the man whom God had chosen.

Why did God not simply tell Samuel that His chosen was David? Why parade all Jesse's sons before Samuel's critical gaze only to deny each one? Perhaps the answer lies in God's words to Samuel upon seeing Eliab, the eldest son: *"Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."*¹

Appearances can be impressive and Eliab was outwardly what Samuel thought a king should resemble. But God looks deeper – then and now. It was not simply that God had not chosen Eliab; God had rejected him. The deeper gaze of God had not found what he was looking for in any of Jesse's sons apart from one, the youngest and he was tending sheep.² But still Samuel missed the point.

When David entered, Samuel saw one who was *ruddy, with beautiful eyes and a handsome appearance*.³ He was still looking with the eyes of a man on the outward appearance. God looks past that and focuses on David's heart: *"Arise, anoint him; for this is he."*⁴ In David, God saw one who loved Him.

The youngest, the least important in the family, the sheep-tender, the boy who is never home, but is out in the fields all night with the flock – this is the one whom God has chosen to be king? Why?

David's later encounter with Goliath speaks volumes: *"For who is this ... that he should taunt the armies of the living God? ... The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine."*⁵ This is a youngster whose heart is in tune with God's heart. He knows Him. He trusts Him. He takes action according to His will in spite of the challenges, the improbabilities and the impossibilities. He knows, in a knowledge bred from experience, that God is not hindered by outward appearances. Not his; not Goliath's. *"I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel,"*⁶ he stated to the giant Goliath. God's assessment of David's heart has found in it a tendency for David to consider God's heart, in order to align his thoughts and words and actions with what he saw there. That's love.

David had been taught – as every Israelite child was – about God. But he had got to know God himself in his skirmishes as a shepherd with lions and bears, in his



David's heart yearned for God's heart.

countless hours experiencing his shepherd's care for his sheep and in his meditations in the hours spent alone with his God on the hillsides of Israel.

It's one thing to know about God; quite another to know God. And David's heart yearned for God's heart. How do we know? God said that David was a man after His own heart.⁷ That's where God looks and in David's heart He found what He was looking for: trust in God, obedience in action, care for others, a yearning for God's will and a delight in accomplishing it. That's love. Perfect? He certainly wasn't! Thankfully, for David and for us, God looks, not for perfection in us, but for a heart that yearns for God's own heart. And not only because of what God has done for us in Christ, but simply because of who Christ is. It is quite clear that David's heart was God's possession and, as a result of that relationship, David could place his trust, imperfect as it was, in Him.

On his death-bed, David showed his love for God in his charge to his son Solomon who was to take over the throne: *"And keep the charge of the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes, His commandments, His ordinances, and His testimonies ..."*⁸ Keep the focus on God, not on yourself or on anyone or anything else! It is love for God that is vitally important – then and now.

When other things, even good things, replace our relationship with God, we are on dangerous ground and our hearts are askew. The Lord Jesus said: *"... for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."*⁹ Is our treasure in something other than God and His heart? Our

treasure is where we'll find our heart if we're looking for it. David's treasure and heart were in God.

Ahijah proclaimed the calamitous word of the Lord to King Jeroboam's disguised wife, contrasting Jeroboam with David, of whom God said: "*who kept My commandments and who followed Me with all his heart, to do only that which was right in My sight.*"¹⁰ David's loyalty to the Lord is commended in 1 Kings 15:3: *[Abijam's] heart was not wholly devoted to the LORD his God, like the heart of his father David.* In spite of sinful things David did, his heart was God's. He loved the Lord. *David did what was right in the sight of the LORD, and had not turned aside from anything that He commanded him all the days of his life*¹¹ with one notable exception. Isn't it encouraging to know that imperfection and even blatant sin cannot destroy the testimony of the man whose heart is after God's own heart. Men may disdain, but God does not. Such is His heart; such ought to be ours. Not so much what we see of an outward show, but what God sees when He looks at the heart. God understands what we sometimes fail to understand – that our sinful actions are the result of weakness, even with a heart that longs for God's. So He has given us the promise of 1 John 1:9 to deal with every outward evidence that belies our heart's affection for Him. Because, of course, that is His heart. Is it reflected in our own?

David's own words declare his love:

*I love You, O LORD, my strength ...
For I have kept the ways of the LORD,
and have not wickedly departed from my God.*¹²

It's no wonder he could confidently attest:

*For You light my lamp;
the LORD my God illumines my darkness.
For by You I can run upon a troop;
and by my God I can leap over a wall.*¹³

Trouble has a way of finding us all, and David was no exception. And yet he could live victoriously in his loving relationship with God and vibrantly say: *He makes my feet like hinds' feet, and sets me upon my high places.*¹⁴ Surely it is a heart that loves God which can live in victorious joy when all around – the outward appearance – paints a picture of defeat. Since God chooses to look deeper than the outward appearances of men and circumstances, surely we who seek to love Him must choose to do the same.

David's secret of loving God is perhaps seen in his prayer:

*Make me know Your ways, O LORD;
teach me Your paths.
Lead me in Your truth and teach me,
for You are the God of my salvation;
for You I wait all the day.*¹⁵

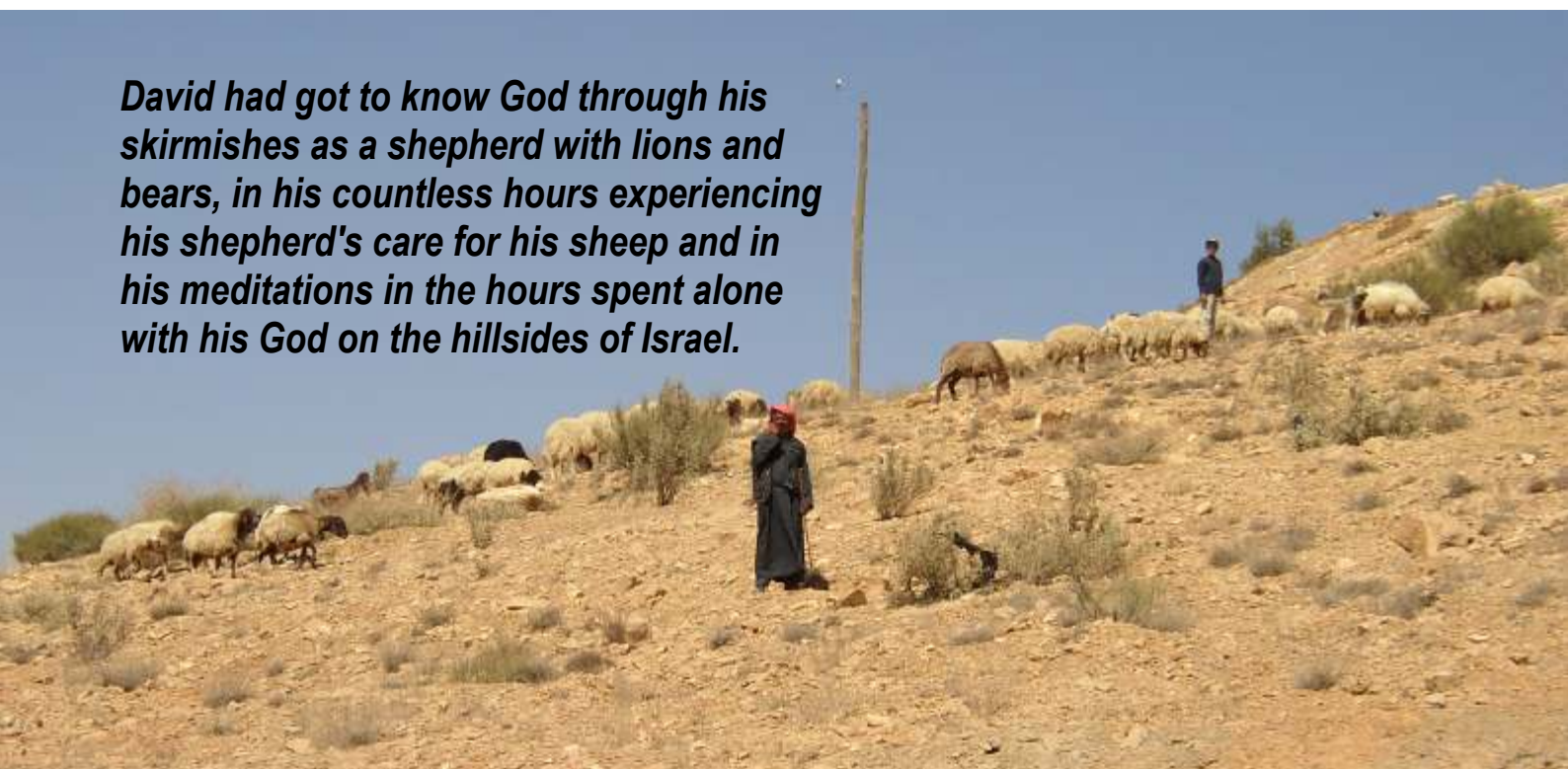
It was in his relationship with the Lord, his complete reliance upon Him, his utter devotion to all that was found in God's heart that David found his heart centring, and his life depending and thriving. What God loved, David loved. What God hated, David hated. What God desired, David desired. What God commanded, David relentlessly pursued. David was indeed a lover of God. But what is more amazing? God was a lover of David. And us!

God has revealed His heart. Will we say with David: *My eyes are continually toward the LORD*¹⁶? And not only our eyes, but our hearts! And we, too, shall be lovers of God.

References: (1) 1 Sam. 16:7 (2) 1 Sam 16:11 (3) & (4) 1 Sam. 16:12 (5) 1 Sam. 17:26,37 (6) 1 Sam. 17:45 (7) 1 Sam. 13:14 (8) 1 Kin. 2:3 (9) Mat. 6:21 (10) 1 Kin. 14:8 (11) 1 Kin. 15:5 (12) Ps. 18:1,21 (13) Ps. 18:28-29 (14) Ps. 18:33 (15) Ps. 25:4 (16) Ps. 25:15

Bible quotations from NASB

David had got to know God through his skirmishes as a shepherd with lions and bears, in his countless hours experiencing his shepherd's care for his sheep and in his meditations in the hours spent alone with his God on the hillsides of Israel.



David

How do you respond to jealousy?

Keith Dorricott, Toronto, Canada

If someone criticizes you, speaks against you unfairly, or treats you with disrespect, how do you typically react? The example of David with King Saul may help us in these types of situation.

The young man David and King Saul had a very difficult relationship. It seems that Saul was a very insecure man, despite his dominating appearance, and he often showed real jealousy towards others. The prophet Samuel knew this, and when he was told by the Lord to go to Bethlehem to choose Saul's successor, he feared that if Saul heard of it he would kill him.¹

Initially Saul loved David, but a harmful spirit would overcome him, and David would come to be in greater and greater danger. Initially when this happened, David would be called in to play calming music for him.

Then, after David as a young 'nobody' defeated Goliath, everyone kept singing his praises: *'Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands.'* This saying continued to be used by the people for a long time.² This really provoked Saul and he kept his eye on his perceived rival from then on. Twice during these periods Saul threw a spear at David while he was playing to calm him; both times David managed to evade it.

David had difficulty understanding Saul's resentment of him. But never once did he respond in kind. Without a doubt, this was because the Spirit of the Lord was on him.³ Naturally, it goes against our grain to receive this sort of constant unfounded criticism and condemnation without responding in kind. The general wisdom of the world is that this would lead automatically to our being taken advantage of and defeated. But God's ways are different.

Saul promised to give his oldest daughter to David to be his wife, but then gave her to someone else. He then gave Michal, his other daughter instead; hoping that the Philistines would defeat David. David's reaction was: *"Who am I, and who are my relatives, my father's clan in Israel, that I should be son-in-law to the king?"*⁴ Saul lied to David that he was doing it out of his care for him. He sent word that the bride-price was to be 100 foreskins of the Philistines (Israel's biggest enemy at that time), thinking that the Philistines would defeat him; instead David got 200 foreskins!

On several occasions when David was playing music to pacify Saul, Saul's fear of David caused him to fling a



javelin at him to kill him, but each time David continued to avoid it; eventually he had to escape from Saul's presence. Saul then sent people to find him in order to kill him, but David escaped – because *the LORD was with him.*⁵ At times Saul chased after David, and on one occasion he had 85 priests killed for helping David. When David heard this, he blamed himself.⁶

David knew that King Saul was trying to kill him. Saul took 3000 soldiers to pursue David at Engedi, near Masada at the Dead Sea, east of Jerusalem. Saul went into a cave to take a break. David's companions told him about this and said it was his big opportunity to attack Saul. But David wouldn't do it. Instead he just went stealthily and cut off a bit of his robe, and said to his companions, *"The Lord forbid that I should do this thing to my lord, the LORD's anointed, to put out my hand against him, seeing he is the LORD's anointed."*⁷ Then he went some distance away and called back to Saul, *"My lord the king!"* And when Saul looked across at him, *David bowed with his face to the earth and paid homage,* showing the piece of his robe that he had cut off. He shouted, *"Why do you listen to the words of men who say, 'Behold, David seeks your harm'? Behold, this day your eyes have seen how the LORD gave you today into my hand in the cave. And some told me to kill you, but I spared you. I said, 'I will not put out my hand against my lord, for he is the LORD's anointed.' See, my father, see the corner of your robe in my hand. For by the fact that I cut off the corner of your robe and did not kill you, you may know and see that there is no wrong or treason in my hands. I have not sinned against you, though you hunt my life to take it."* When Saul heard this and realized who it was, he *lifted up his voice and wept. He said to David, "You are more righteous than I, for you have repaid me good, whereas I have repaid you evil. And you have declared this day how you have dealt well with me, in that you did not kill me when the Lord put me into your hands."* But nothing changed.⁸

We are told clearly that, as those who have been brought into an everlasting relationship with Jesus Christ, we are to *Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.*⁹ Jesus Himself is the perfect example of this. The only time He ever spoke in anger was not for His own sake, but for the honour of His Father. Entering the temple courts one day, He found them filled with money changers, cattle traders and dove sellers: *“Take these things away; do not make my Father’s house a house of trade.”*¹⁰ When they accused Him so terribly falsely at His so-called trial, He said nothing. And then when the ignorant cruel Romans lashed Him severely and nailed Him to a wooden cross to hang Him up to die in unimaginable agony, He responded, “Father, forgive them. They don’t know what they are doing.”¹¹

*We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbour for his good, to build him up. For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, “The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me.”*¹²

When David was in Ziklag, about 20 miles west of Jerusalem, he heard that Saul had been killed in battle with the Philistines, together with his sons, down south on Mount Gilboa. The Bible says: *Then David took hold of*



“Father, forgive them.”

*his clothes and tore them, and so did all the men who were with him. And they mourned and wept and fasted until evening for Saul and for Jonathan his son and for the people of the LORD and for the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword.*¹³ David’s lamentation became well known throughout the country: *“How the mighty have fallen in the midst of the battle!”*¹⁴ And so, to the very end, David treated King Saul as the anointed of the Lord and never acted towards him in the same way as Saul did to him.

What an example for us of how we should treat other Christians who may treat us badly where naturally we may want to defend ourselves! The apostle Paul writes, *From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.*¹⁵ In other words, we are never to treat others as we may have done in the past, but instead as Christ would act – now that we are new creatures in Christ Jesus.

Early on in David and Saul’s relationship we read about a pivotal change that took place: *The Spirit of the LORD rushed upon David from that day forward. ... the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and a harmful spirit from the LORD tormented him.*¹⁶ This made all the difference. What is it that can give us the motivation and the discipline to respond that way every time, when we are being very mistreated? The answer is the same for us as it was for David. There is only this one way – *be filled with the Spirit.*¹⁷ As we choose to allow Him to, the Holy Spirit will enable us to respond as we should to the full, as David did, and the Lord will be glorified each time.

References: (1) 1 Sam. 16:2 (2) 1 Sam. 8:7; 21:11; 29:5 (3) 1 Sam 16:13 (4) 1 Sam. 18:18 (5) 1 Sam. 18:12,14,28 (6) 1 Sam. 22:22 (7) 1 Sam. 24:6 (8) 1 Sam. 24:1-22 (9) Rom. 12:14 (10) John 2:16 (11) Luke 23:34 (12) Rom. 15:1-3 (13) 2 Sam. 1:11-12 (14) 2 Sam. 1:25 (15) 2 Cor. 5:16-17 (16) 1 Sam. 16:13-14 (17) Eph. 5:18

Bible quotations from ESV



**“You have repaid me good,
whereas I have repaid you evil.”**

One-anothering

Judging one another

Ira Williamson, Trinidad, USA

The Royal Gorge Bridge in Colorado spans a 938 foot gap across the Arkansas River. Far more impressive is the 955 foot drop to the river below – making this the highest bridge in the USA and the highest in the world until 2001.

As a popular tourist destination, I remember an advertisement that simply said: ‘500,000 people can’t be wrong!’ above a stunning photograph of this impressive canyon. I understand the sentiment, but the truth is ... they can be. In fact, there are over 7 billion people in the world and every one of them is wrong to some degree. Including you!

When considering the subject of judging one another, Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 7:1-6 is very instructive. Though it begins with the often misused statement, “*Do not judge ...*”, these few verses teach us how not to judge and lead us to understand the proper exercise and value of ‘righteous judgment’. Not only is righteous judgment allowed, it is – as we will consider later – a requirement of disciples of Christ. However, the more often practised aspects of judging one another need to be eliminated so that we might better search each other in God’s will. The hypercritical, self-righteous judgment which Jesus condemned is addressed by looking in the mirror and seeing ourselves clearly first.

James emphasizes the point,¹ categorically stating that people who carelessly bring critical or slanderous accusations against others are actually guilty of setting themselves as judges not only of those persons, but of the Law: *He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law.* Judgmental words erode relationships and, before too long, a great gulf appears – often with no bridge to cross it! People sometimes seem near to us – in our families, our churches, our neighbours – yet the separation is real, and deep.

Love bridges this gap and, in fact, avoids it in the first place! Those we love, we judge less and gossip about less. Those we love we consider more, encourage more and protect more. Is there a ‘gap’ near you that needs a bridge? Jesus also simply said, “*Love one another*”² – more than a good idea; it’s a command from God.

Of course this is easier said than done, but perhaps it would help us to consider the Apostle Paul’s command: *Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.*³ Remember



“Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?” (Mat.7:3)

our helpless state before God? What did He do? Could we ever be more gracious than Him? Certainly not, but should we be less? Though Paul’s list of things that are to be put away from us does not include ‘judging one another’, these are all aspects of that divisive, destructive and eroding judgment that we must avoid.

The Gospel message is a lens that displays the clearest view of ourselves. We were saved from the very things we are often quick to judge in others. If God were so quick to judge, Jesus would never have seen Calvary and we would never have seen Him! But God is patient and full of mercy. And we have been called to follow this same path – not just seeing ourselves as God sees us, but seeing others from God’s perspective too.

It’s easy to see the danger of this destructive judgment, but we must understand the importance of righteous judgment. In Matthew 7 Jesus teaches us ‘first’ to look at ourselves ‘then’ with clear unobstructed vision to help remove the speck from our brother’s eye. We do not turn a blind eye to sin, rather one cleared by carefully looking into God’s Word.⁴ Righteous judgment in this case involves a beneficial act of good will, rather than a hypocritical criticism that does no good.

In John 7:24 Jesus says, “*Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.*” This leaves little room for opinion. God’s Word is our source of righteous judgment.

With a Spirit-led view of ourselves, a Bible-based assessment of those we consider, and words spoken in love, those around us would not only be closer, but stronger and healthier as well. That in turn would have a positive effect on us – and may even result in removing that ‘log’ we’d missed ourselves!

References: (1) Jas. 4:11 (2) John 13:34 (3) Eph. 4:31-32 (4) Jas. 1:22-26

Bible quotations from NASB

Early heresies

Docetism

Brian Johnston, Leigh, England

What is docetism?

From a Greek work meaning 'to seem', this was an early heresy which questioned in some respects the reality of Jesus' humanity. For example, some Docetists might have claimed, as a man called Cerinthus apparently did, that the Christ-spirit came upon the man Jesus at His baptism, but left Him before His death.

The Apostle John throws out the challenge: *every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God*.¹ There's an old reading of this verse that gets a mention in the margin of some Bible versions (e.g. RV) in which not to confess Jesus is regarded as annulling or loosing Jesus. It seems that this matter of failing to confess Jesus was initially understood as separating or loosing Jesus from the Christ instead of identifying them as one and the same.

This certainly fits with what we know of the heretics' views at the close of the first century. They taught that the Christ, a divine spirit, descended upon the man Jesus at His baptism and withdrew from Him before His death. To counteract this heresy, the Apostle John's language is very precise. It wasn't that the Christ, or Christ spirit, had come into the flesh of Jesus, but that Jesus was the Christ come in the flesh. Jesus and the Christ are to be absolutely identified as one. What's at stake here is the truth of the incarnation.

Preserving the real truth about Christ's humanity is an issue that greatly concerned John. He returns to it again later saying Jesus is ... *the One who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ; not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood*.² Why this particular insistence? An old interpretation which makes sense of the background, understands the water and blood as standing for the historical experiences the Lord passed through in His baptism and death. It seems that, once again, John had the likes of Cerinthus in his sights as perhaps being foremost among those who distinguished between 'Jesus' and 'the Christ'. Their opinion was that Jesus was a mere man, born purely naturally of Joseph and Mary, upon whom the Christ descended at His baptism and from whom the Christ departed before the cross.

Does knowing about it matter?

We still have with us those who deny Jesus' supernatural conception – the reality of the eternal Word becoming flesh³ – as well as those who say that the person who died on the cross was not, or was no longer, the Christ: that God's Christ could never be crucified.

New Age philosophy regards Jesus as an 'avatar' – someone who descends into human form to manifest 'Christ-consciousness' – as though the Christ spirit descended to reveal divine truth to people in Jesus. The Koran says, 'they did not kill him, neither did they crucify



him; he was made a semblance to them'.⁴ It would seem Muhammad derived his knowledge of the gospel story from a docetic source, and so the Islamic Faith is the only major worldview today which overtly denies Christ died on the cross.

Shades of docetist thinking can, however, be more subtle. Early teachers of the Brethren Movement variously debated whether the Lord's human nature was 'fallen', 'mortal', or 'heavenly'. Formulations such as 'the Person of God in the condition of Man', seemed to those who debated against them then to be evading the clear statement of the personal, proper, unimpaired humanity of our Lord, as a descendant of David according to the flesh⁵ and indeed as *her seed* when referring to *the woman*.⁶

Views detrimental to our Lord's manhood have often found a degree of acceptance that would never be extended to views detrimental to His deity – such as the view that from conception to birth our Lord passed through the body of His mother 'like water through a pipe', deriving no part of His humanity from her. Writing in 1901, W. B. Neatby said, 'A year or two ago I heard an address from a Brother of the Open Section, who actually taught that Christ did not die from crucifixion, but by a mere miraculous act ...' Or again, we may think of those who refuse to interpret our Lord's temptations as being real.⁷

How wonderfully precise the inspired writing of the Apostle Paul is when he says: *For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh*.⁸ Our Lord did not come in the mere likeness of flesh; far less in sinful flesh; but in the likeness of sinful flesh – fully and truly human as we are (which, as our kinsman redeemer, was required of Him), but without sin and indeed incapable of it.

References: (1) 1 John 4:3 (2) 1 John 5:5-6 (3) John 1:14 (4) Sura 4:156-8 (5) Rom. 1:3 (6) Gen. 3:15 (7) All 3 examples from F.F. Bruce, 'The Humanity of Jesus Christ', *Journal of the Christian Brethren Research Fellowship* 24 (1973): 5-15 (8) Rom. 8:3

Bible quotations from NASB

The rights and wrongs

Abortion

Peter Hickling, Cromer, England

The two camps

Sober thought about this subject is bedevilled by labels; on the one hand are those who call themselves 'pro-life', and on the other those who say they are 'pro-choice'. The issue seems to be more fiercely divisive in the United States, but it is relevant everywhere, and as we shall see, recent advances in medical technology offer choices which may seem morally abhorrent.

When does human life begin?

It is obvious that our answer to this question must affect our attitude to abortion. Very few in civilised countries would advocate deliberately permitting a young child to die – indeed, such an action would be illegal. The people of Britain were horrified by a recent case in which a mother starved her child to death and kept the body at home for two months. The fundamental question is, "Is the unborn child a 'person'?" If so, killing the foetus becomes an act of infanticide, and could only be justified for very restricted reasons. Some have argued that at the moment of independent breathing the child becomes a 'living soul', basing this on Genesis 2:7: ... *God breathed ... and man became a living soul*. However, argument based on Adam is not really sound, since he was a full-grown creature.

An alternative view is that the fertilised ovum, the embryo, is a nascent human being. This agrees with the teaching of Romans 5:12: *sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned*. The sin of Adam was transmitted to all his posterity by human generation.

This second view seems to more satisfactorily accord with Scripture.

Abortion in practice

The prospect of a new baby is normally an occasion for joy, and even if it results in economic hardship it should be thought of as a gift from God. Regrettably, some women miscarry ('spontaneous abortion') before the foetus can survive, which can be a great grief to the parents, particularly if the child appears to be viable. Obviously, there is no fault here; the couple deserve our prayer and support. What about seeking the termination of a pregnancy? Whatever one's view of the time when the child becomes a 'soul', it is a fact that in the normal course of events the child will be born as a baby, grow up and become an adult whom God may use. The law permits abortion if permitting the birth to proceed may damage the physical or mental health of the mother, a provision which has been very widely interpreted. In the



case of a Christian, it should be narrowly interpreted. If it really is a case of 'one life or the other' it does seem legitimate to preserve the life of the mother, who is already a responsible human being.

It is possible to determine the sex of a foetus before birth, and in some cultures, particularly China, with its 'one child' policy, boys are preferred to girls, so girls can be aborted. This is an abhorrent practice, comparable with Hitler's eugenics policy. Christians should have nothing to do with it.

Particular problems arise when it is known that the foetus will be defective in some way. The most serious of these is 'anencephaly', when the child has no, or almost no, brain. Such infants are usually stillborn, and even if they live for a short period; they will never gain consciousness. Abortion does seem justified in such cases.

A Down's Syndrome child will usually be a lifetime's responsibility for its parents. In consequence of this many such foetuses are aborted. A Christian couple faced with this agonising decision must pray about it together, asking the Lord's guidance. The Christian has a resource that others do not have, the support of the Holy Spirit within. This can enable her to bear things that would crush others. Many can testify that their lives have been enriched through caring for a handicapped child.

What about unmarried mothers?

Scripture is quite clear that the place for sexual intercourse, and hence for motherhood, is within marriage, but it is a fact that almost half the children in Britain are born out of wedlock. If a child is to be born to an established couple, the relationship can be made more stable, to the advantage of both the child and themselves, if they marry. However, it frequently happens that the father does not want to take any responsibility. Should the girl then carry on alone? Many do, although the life of a single mother is difficult. Surely abortion is not justified in such a case; the mother has made the choice, and ought to accept its consequences. Adoption is painful, but there are many childless couples who are longing for a child in their family.

Any decision that a Christian makes should be taken in the light of prayer for God's guidance.

Methods of Bible study

Studying with your heart

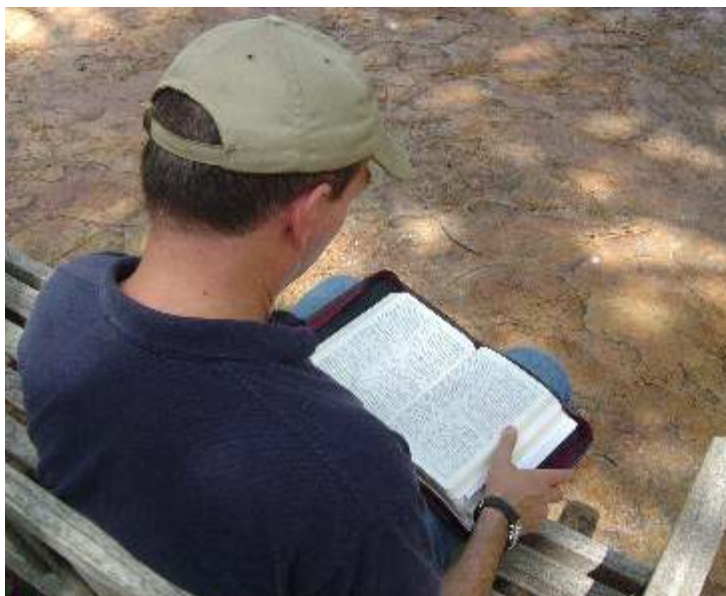
Karl Smith, Kirkintilloch, Scotland

The most important thing to do with the Bible is to read it! A little time with God's Word every day is an absolute necessity for the Christian who wants to survive as a disciple of the Lord Jesus in this world.

It is also good to sit down and read through the Bible from beginning to end in longer instalments. This gives a sense of perspective as to how the little chunks we read morning by morning fit into the wider picture of the whole Word of God. Once we have gained a broad sense of the Bible's overall narrative, however, it is good to go beyond reading and to study God's Word. Even an hour each week spent looking carefully at the way words are used in the Bible, for example, or the places and people we read about, will really enrich your enjoyment of your normal Bible reading. If you are not sure about how to go about this, our series gives some suggestions.

The first rule of Bible study is to look for something to obey. Love for the Word of God makes us want to get into it because there we will find His will so that we may do it. God doesn't want us to study just to get more knowledge. He wants us to love Him more and more as we understand more of His ways. We express this love by obeying His commandments. The list of things the Scriptures provide in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 concludes with *training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work*. If our Bible study is not equipping us to do good for the Master, it is not achieving its purpose.

It's not just a head thing – it's a heart thing. We read of one leader amongst God's Old Testament people *that*



*Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the LORD, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel.*¹ Ezra's heart was in his Bible study and *the good hand of his God was on him.*² In response, we read *On the second day the heads of fathers' houses of all the people, with the priests and the Levites, came together to Ezra the scribe in order to study the words of the Law.*³ As a result, they recovered the commandment to keep the feast of tabernacles (or booths), which seems to have been neglected. As they kept this forgotten festival, *there was very great rejoicing.*⁴

Our study of the Word of God may bring repentance as we recover neglected truth, but implementing what we have studied in our lives and in our churches leads to real praise to God. Think of those who re-discovered from their study the significance of the simple breaking of bread and of our access into heaven as we gather to remember the Lord Jesus. Think of those who re-discovered the truth about the Lord's coming for believers and His return to rule on earth. Think of those who rediscovered the pattern for the relationship of love and unity between each church of God and for leadership amongst God's people. These joyful discoveries were the result of serious study of the Bible over many generations and we're grateful to each Ezra who set his heart to study, do and teach. Similarly, as we ourselves study we will discover things that the Lord wants to apply to our individual lives and as we do so, there will be repentance and rejoicing.

Bible study will not happen unless we make it happen. You may need to set aside a particular time in the week when you have no other commitments. Finding an hour or two without interruptions can be difficult, especially with family, work and church. Nevertheless, the sacrifice will be rewarded in the here and now. As you dig into the context of each verse, you are digging a well which the Holy Spirit will fill more deeply with joy each time you return to them.

References: (1) Ezra 7:10 (2) Ezra 7:9 (3) Neh. 8:13 (4) Neh. 8:17

Bible quotations from ESV

Victory

Overcoming issues

An interview with Bryan Dougan, Edinburgh, Scotland

Bryan, please share with our readers a little of your background.

Along with two colleagues, I started a business in 1994. From humble beginnings in a friend's garage, we became the largest independent supplier of computer scanners in the UK by 1999. With a large UK base, and distributors in Italy, France and South Africa, both business and life were great. I was thinking: "This can never end." However, *many plans are in a man's heart, but the counsel of the LORD will stand.*¹

There's more than a hint already, but where would you say you were spiritually at that point?

In my mind, I was ticking all the boxes: attending church services; taking part; involving myself in this and that ... I convinced myself that, because my business was so successful, this demonstrated God was blessing me and therefore I must be on the right track. It's said that hindsight is a wonderful thing – and, looking back now, I see that the balance was wrong!

Looking back, my real focus was on my work – my own ambitions, desires and goals. That led to a desire for a bigger house, a faster car and better holidays. These were viewed as the rewards for hard work.

I hadn't given much consideration to the fact that all I had wasn't actually mine, but was given to me by God. On reflection, what I was giving back to God was very little in return. It reminds me of another verse – *the mind of man plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps.*²

God was speaking, and I wasn't listening. Like the dismantling of Israel systematically, God removed from me everything I considered important. Work became very hard. The straightforward approach that

worked for years wasn't working any more. In fact, nothing seemed to work: the business was languishing, and, to make matters worse, the Chinese manufacturers who had happily helped us to generate massive interest in the UK, now became our competitor. By the end of 2003, it was all over.

What would you pinpoint as the real turning point?

With no buyer for the company, it was clear that this good thing had come to an end. It was a hard pill to swallow: losing everything that had seemed so important. There came a point when I remember saying, "God, why me?" Frustrated, I voiced this to my wife, Tracey, who said, "Why not? Would you rather this was happening to someone else. Have you asked God to make it stop?" My response was, "No," actually I hadn't.

We got down on our knees and prayed like never before: "Lord, please make this stop, please take over. I'm sorry I've not been listening." Then a remarkable thing happened. Having been forced to put our house up for sale some time previously, within two days a couple came, agreed a price, and concluded the sale! "Lord, thank you."

Why would you describe this as a 'victory' as opposed to a rescue?

God needed to get my attention and to get it, He had to break me. I learnt a lot through that experience. I thought I could be used, but didn't appreciate that sometimes you need to be broken first. Or maybe I was broken and God was putting me together His way.

I then felt like I suspect Gideon must have felt when asking God for direction and victory. What was it that God wanted? And if we were asking God to commit to helping us, what were we doing in return?



I remember not long after getting back into things I was invited to speak at a church meeting at which there was a good number of visitors. On the way home I realised that, before the collapse of my business, I hadn't really been involved in that sort of speaking. God hadn't used me before, and I also realised that was because my lifestyle had not been worthy! As a result, I did something I hadn't done before: I asked God what He wanted me to be involved in. I learned to wait for God, rather than just getting on with what I thought I wanted to do.

Reflecting again on this, what would you say was the most valued thing you learnt?

I've realised that trials don't knock on our door and let you know they're arriving. They hit you full-on and when least expected. They can be God's way of getting our attention and it's futile to take them on alone, but with God's help we can overcome. I've been thinking about Job when he said, "*I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees You.*"³ Through trials ours is to be a deepening, personal relationship with God.

References: (1) Prov.19:21
(2) Prov.16:9 (3) Job 42:5

Bible quotations from NASB

Christ in the Gospels

Matthew's Christ

Edwin Neely, Brantford, Canada

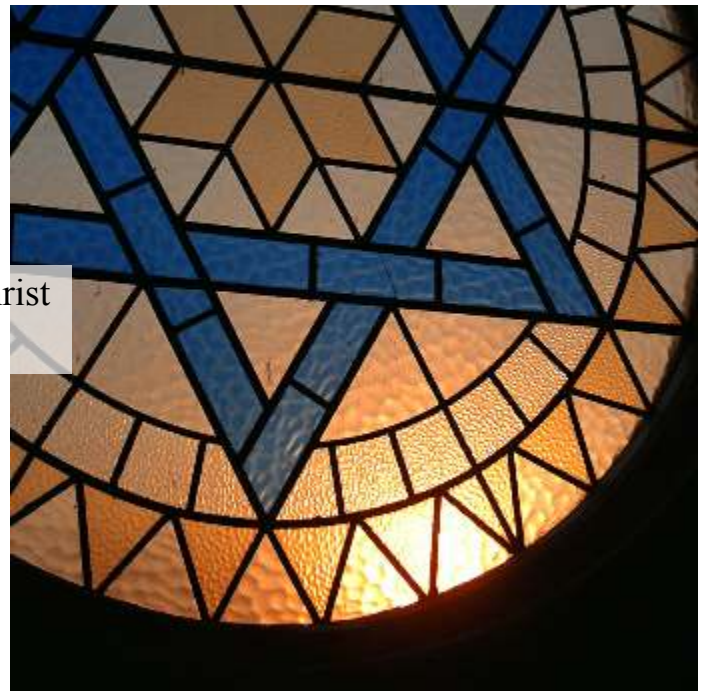
Each Gospel writer presents the Lord Jesus Christ from a different perspective.

Matthew, whose writing tends to be organized thematically rather than chronologically, arranges his Gospel around five great discourses of the Lord.¹ He also relies heavily on Old Testament quotations, using them about fifty times and referring to that book an additional seventy-five. This particularly suits his purpose to relate to his Jewish audience that the Jesus of whom he wrote was none other than the 'seed of Abraham' through whom all the nations of the earth would be blessed and the direct descendent of David who must eventually occupy the throne. Matthew was particularly suited to write his book having been a tax-gatherer and having to keep careful records.²

Once Matthew had been called by the Lord to discipleship, he prepared a feast for his former colleagues and invited Jesus as the honoured guest, no doubt to introduce them to the Saviour.³ This kind of intensity also displays itself in the work that he was called to accomplish by the Holy Spirit in his writing.

Micah had prophesied the place of Christ's birth and the fact that He would be ruler in Israel.⁴ Matthew goes about proving this by dividing his book into six sections, each one finishing with words such as *And when Jesus finished these words* or *finished giving instructions* or *finished these parables*.⁵ Each section proves Jesus to be the Messiah, the sent One from God, the King.

Concentrating largely on the oral teachings of the Lord, Matthew shows clearly the answer to the question plaguing the Jews of his day: "If this is the King, where is His kingdom?" While God's kingdom takes a different form in this age, David's throne will be seen to be eternally established in a future time when Christ returns to this earth to confirm His rule and authority. Matthew is the only Gospel writer to mention the 'church' and to



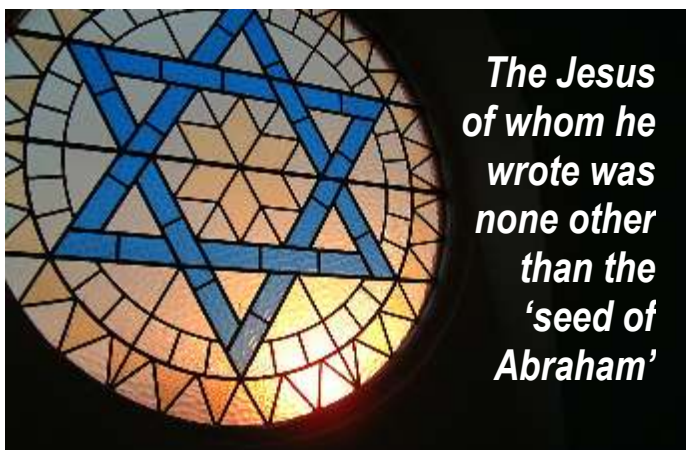
show the nature of discipline within it in Christ's present realm on earth.⁶ He also proves over and over that this One fulfils the prophecies and promises of the Old Testament, citing again and again *that it might be fulfilled*.⁷

Matthew has been called the Gospel of the King. Not only does the writing begin with ancestral tracing back to David, the Magi from the east come inquiring, "*Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?*"⁸ Eight times over Matthew ascribes the regal title 'Son of David' to the Saviour,⁹ he relates the fulfilment of Zechariah's prophecy about the triumphal entry with all its kingly significance¹⁰ and tells Jesus' own words about His future reign:¹¹ "... then [the Son of Man] will sit on His glorious throne." Jesus is asked by Pilate, "*Are you the king of the Jews?*" to which He answers, "*It is as you say.*"¹² Over the cross of Christ is written, *THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS*.¹³ This is the One who said, "*All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth...*"¹⁴ The whole book is arranged around Jesus as King: His birth as king of the Jews, His preparation for kingship, His power, His kingdom, His kingly mission, His kingly entry into Jerusalem, the future kingdom, the death and resurrection of the King and the great commission of the King and kingdom.

The day is hastening when Christ will be revealed, King of the Jews, King of the nations, King of kings. This is Matthew's Messiah and King, the Saviour of the Jews, and, thankfully, our Saviour and King also.¹⁵

References: (1) Mat. 5-7; 10; 13; 18; 24-25 (2) Mat. 9:9 (3) Luke 5:29-32; Mat. 9:10 (4) Micah 5:2 (5) Mat. 7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1 (6) Mat. 16:18; 18:17 (7) NKJV e.g. Mat. 2:23 (8) Mat. 2:2 (9) Mat. 1:1; 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30, 31; 21:9,15 (10) Mat. 21:1-11 (11) Mat. 25:31 (12) Mat. 27:11 (13) Mat. 27:37 (14) Mat. 28:18 (15) Mat. 28:19-20

Bible quotations from NASB



**The Jesus
of whom he
wrote was
none other
than the
'seed of
Abraham'**

Mission

ReachOut

Lennie Shaw & Steve Seddon

Praise God that He is blessing His people in our time!

We are greatly encouraged at regular reports from Africa, India and the Far East, demonstrating that the borders of His kingdom are being enlarged as new churches of God are planted, and established churches are strengthened with increasing numbers. While, as a world-wide community we rejoice, in the West we have a deep concern because overall numbers are declining. Our service is not without fruit, for which we give God thanks, however our desire and burden before the Lord is that we will know growth in our churches too.

We have no doubt about the Lord's will in this area. Indeed we share the desire of God our Saviour that *all people be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth*.¹ We want to see the power of the gospel changing lives and bringing hope into our communities. We want to see churches of God growing numerically and to be living, vibrant, Spirit-led testimonies to His grace.

A recent survey amongst UK churches of God showed that there is a real appetite to reach out to communities with the gospel. At the same time, however, there is concern about the effectiveness of outreach methods which are often constrained by limited manpower and resources, and somehow fall short of winning souls for the Lord Jesus and bringing disciples into His kingdom.

At ReachOut, a UK event held in the North West of England in September 2013, we explored the process of disciple-making in contemporary Western culture. For a church of God, eager to reach out to its local community, we see a five step process: **CONNECTING** with the community; developing **RELATIONSHIPS** with individuals in the community; **CHALLENGING** them with the gospel; **TEACHING** them New Testament



church truth; and leading them on into **SERVICE** among the Lord's people.

While many aspects of our outreach activities are effective in one or two steps of this process, there is a common struggle in transitioning contacts all the way through – ultimately resulting in them being baptised, added to a church of God, and actively serving amongst the Lord's people.

ReachOut was designed to:

- Encourage saints by sharing examples of fruit-bearing work being done already
- Share experiences of difficulties in outreach and best practices to overcome them
- Exchange ideas
- Challenge one another regarding our effectiveness for Christ in our communities
- Help UK churches to form outreach plans.

Exhibition-style displays showed many examples of how churches are currently engaged in a wide variety of outreach activities. Seminars provided a forum for focused consideration of each step in the disciple-making process and included a time of prayer to plead before the Lord for help in making us more effective in reaching out.

The exhibition impressively demonstrated just how active the churches of God are. More than 40 stalls illustrated

over 140 outreach activities including:

- One-man pottery outreach
- Helping those in debt get back on their feet through 'Christians against Poverty'
- Parent & toddler groups
- Ladies' nights
- Coffee mornings
- Festival outreach stalls
- Live music-based outreach
- Conventional gospel services

The challenging ministry at the beginning and end of the event drew our attention to the outreach





methods the Lord Jesus Himself used. Reaching out to the man with leprosy, *moved with pity he stretched out his hand and touched him,*² and then to Peter, believing but struggling, *Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him.*³ In addition there was a salutary

warning about what happens when fishers of men stop fishing: churches die.

The event was concluded with a positive call to action – *“Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.”*⁴

Having been inspired by the level of commitment and activity going on amongst the churches, our eyes have been opened to new and creative ways we can reach out to our communities. We recognise that multiple approaches are needed to be effective in disciple-making. We appeal for prayer for direction from the Holy Spirit; for His power and enabling in this essential aspect of our service; and that the Lord will indeed command His blessing on His people everywhere.

References: (1) 1 Tim. 2:4 NIV (2) Mark 1:41 (3) Mat. 14:31 (4) Luke 5:4 Bible quotations from ESV

Forgiving one another

Alan Toms, 1930-2010

Onesimus was a runaway slave, whom the apostle Paul helped to find the Saviour. He spoke about him as ... *my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten while in my chains.*¹ He became very helpful to the aged apostle when he was in prison, and that’s interesting, because his name means ‘helpful’. Having received new life in Christ, he was now being helped to live out the meaning of his name.

Paul would have liked to keep him with him, but there were things in his life which had to be put right first. He’d run away from his master Philemon, and stolen from him too, as far as we can judge. So Paul wrote the short letter which in our New Testaments bears Philemon’s name and in it he pleads with him to forgive Onesimus. He promised to repay himself any debt Onesimus owed. It was a masterly letter, full of the love of Christ, and pleading for the forgiveness which springs out of love. I’m sure when Philemon received it he’d be unable to resist the entreaty of his aged friend, and any hard feelings he may have had would gradually melt away.

This matter of forgiveness is so important, and especially when we are Christians. The Lord Jesus said, *“If you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”*² An unforgiving spirit does far more damage to the person who has it than to the one he’s unwilling to forgive.

May I remind you of the words the apostle Paul wrote, also from the Roman prison, round about the same time as he wrote to Philemon, ... *be kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one other, even as God in Christ forgave you.*³ Notice: as God forgave you. How has He forgiven us? Oh, freely and fully and finally, blotting our



sin from His memory. He has forgiven all things, and He has loved us freely. And now He asks that we do the same with anyone who may offend us, or speak unkindly about us. *Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us.*⁴

So we have two great examples on which to pattern our lives – the example of God’s forgiveness and the example of Christ’s love. Both have reached us through the gospel and now we are asked, by the help of the Holy Spirit who dwells within, to show out both these lovely traits in our lives – God’s forgiveness and Christ’s love.

References: (1) Phile. 1:10 (2) Mat. 6:15 (3) Eph. 4:32 (4) Eph. 5:1-2

Bible quotations from NKJV

Alan Toms was a frequent contributor to this magazine for over 50 years. Selections of his writings are currently being compiled into a book which will soon be available from Hayes Press. The above article, originally entitled ‘Onesimus’, produced in 1986 for NT, is a taster of what will be included in the new book.

Inexhaustible grace

Don Williamson, Littleton, USA

So what do we understand about the grace of God? Maybe a more relevant question is: “How is my life impacted by the grace of God?”

It is a point that has been raised recently in evangelical circles in America. A key scripture for all of us is Ephesians 2:8-9, *For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.*

The grandson of Billy Graham, Tullian Tchividjian, is spending time speaking at various churches, including his own, on the topic of ‘Inexhaustible Grace’. The idea here is that believers spend a great deal of time trying to please the Lord and thus improve their relationship with Him, and that leads to their exhaustion. Tully has been addressing the topic from the book of Galatians, which we know is a letter against going back to the law and works for salvation.

Here is part of a conversation that I had recently with a Christian friend:

“It seems from our conversation that you are suggesting that, because of grace, there is no right or wrong way to live our Christian lives. I cannot imagine why God would give us detailed instructions in His Word if He intended us to do whatever we thought was right. It would seem that you suggest ‘the grace of God’ allows believers to do what they wish in all aspects of life so that they can claim true grace. I don’t think Paul would support that even in his letter to the Galatians, for he writes ... *you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. ... walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. ... the one who is taught the word is to share all good things with the one who teaches him.*¹ So manner of life is important, and doing what is taught in Scripture is important; not for eternal life, but for the life of a believer who seeks to serve the Lord in this life.”

There is a formula that is given in this debate. ‘Jesus is everything’ vs. ‘Jesus is everything, but ...’ The



suggestion, of course, is that true grace says, ‘Jesus is everything’ and certain Christian denominations say, ‘Jesus is everything, but ...’ If we are talking about eternal salvation, then we would all have to say “Amen” to ‘Jesus is everything’. As it relates to a believer’s life, I don’t think he has the second part of the formula right. Here is the proper formula: ‘Jesus is everything, therefore ...’ Given that expression, it brings into focus the thought that we, as children of light, are now free to walk in light where before we were in darkness. As an example, Jesus said: “*If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.*”² It is not ‘Jesus is everything, but you must keep His commandments’, it is, ‘Jesus is everything, therefore I am free to keep His commandments.’

Are you feeling exhausted? It is very possible that we go through life and feel the weight of our actions and service to the Lord as a responsibility and requirement. We must do this or that to please the Lord. This was not the mindset that the Lord had for us when we read *it was for freedom that Christ set us free.*³ Why do we serve the Lord? Why do we remember Him on the first day of the week? It is because we love Him and have the freedom to serve Him. Jesus is everything, therefore I am keeping His commandments – not because I am required to, but because I love Him.

Which do you prefer, doing something you love to do or doing something you are required to do? Which one will wear you out?

References: (1) Gal. 5:13,16; 6:6 (2) John 14:15 (3) Gal. 5:1

Bible quotations from NASB

