

# NT

A pattern for life  
in God's House

Letting the Bible  
interpret itself

Members of one  
another

John's Christ

**David:**

Lover of God's Word

His marital relationships

Issue 4 2014

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## NT Needed Truth

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# From the Editors' desk

## New and old

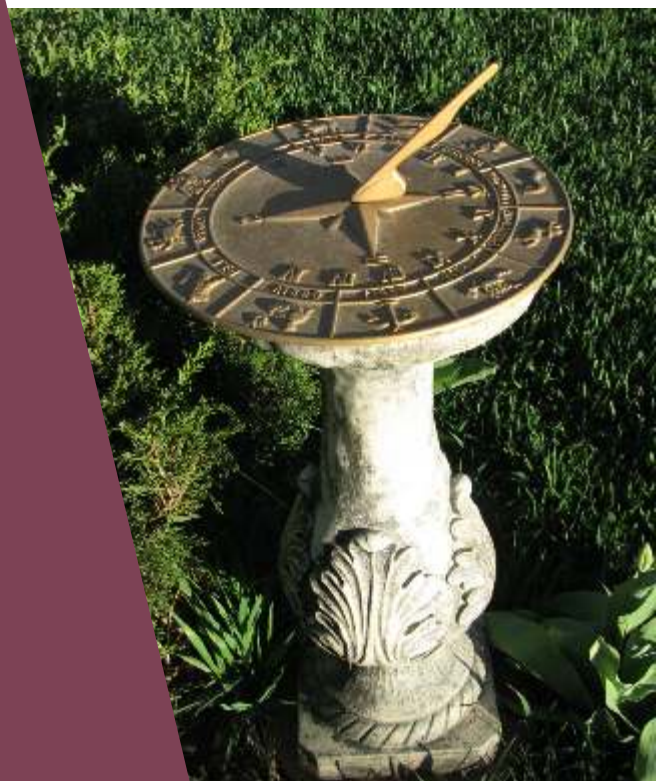
This is the last issue of NT for 2014. Throughout the year Editors have tried to present a full range of Christian articles, expressed in modern language. They range over encouragement, study and devotion to current affairs, personal experiences and mission reports. Our aim, too, is to present the magazine attractively, so that the casual reader will be encouraged to take it up. If you compare a current issue with one of fifty years ago we hope that you will agree that all these objectives have been met.

However, we would be failing in our duty if we only produced an attractive Christian magazine. Our language can be up to date and our material contemporary, but we continue to stand for the teachings which caused the magazine to be first published in the late 1880s. Continuity and development are vital in the Lord's service, as He Himself recognised when He said to His disciples, *"Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old."*<sup>1</sup> He was speaking, of course, of those who expounded the Old Testament Law but had come to learn of the New Covenant, and the same thing applies today; we cannot jettison established truths simply because they are old.

The publishers of the first issues of this magazine said that 'it cannot be denied that one of the most important and most needed lines of truth that have been given by revelation of God, yet remains almost without exposition in the press...', that is '...direct teaching as to that *house of God which is an assembly of the living God, pillar and ground of the truth*'.<sup>2</sup> Thus they began to issue a magazine to teach this truth, which they believed was needed – and what more logical than to call it Needed Truth!

References: (1) Mat. 13:52 ESV (2) Needed Truth Vol.1 p.2

*Peter*



# The well-taught tongue

Eric Willis, Liverpool, England

“Let me see your tongue.” Those of us who are older can no doubt remember that if we were ill and paid a visit to the doctor, he would ask us to do this as he carried out his examination.

Today it is more likely that he would send us to the hospital for a more complex diagnostic procedure! The tongue can tell us much about our health, from changes in its colour, the distinctive texture of its surface and even its size.

In the tongue there are a large number of sense cells or taste buds (approximately 10,000!). So we are able to experience the elementary and varied tastes of sweet, sour, salt and bitter. The tongue also plays a vital part in the chewing and swallowing of our food.

Above all, it enables us to form words so that we can speak and be understood – our speech is controlled by our tongue. We may speak of someone having a ‘sharp tongue’, making a ‘slip of the tongue’ or, when remaining silent under provocation, having to ‘bite their tongue’. This small muscular part of our body, taking up less than 0.045 per cent of our body weight, can be our greatest asset and our most destructive possession.

In Scripture, the word *tongue(s)* occurs some 150 times, almost half of these in the Psalms and Proverbs. James, too, has much to say about the tongue.

*We put bits in horses’ mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body. Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires. Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. ... It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.<sup>1</sup>*

*Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit.<sup>2</sup>*

During the Second World War, posters appeared in many public places carrying the slogan – ‘Careless talk costs lives’ – a timely reminder that the unguarded word could seriously affect the lives of others. Gossip or tale-bearing can also cause division and contention.

*Where there is no wood, the fire goes out: and where there is no talebearer, strife ceases.<sup>3</sup>*

May we always seek to be an encourager and speak the truth in love – to think before we speak and question our motives – Is it kind? Will it help? Is it necessary?

*A wholesome tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit.<sup>4</sup>*

Charles Wesley’s hymn ‘O for a thousand tongues to sing the great Redeemer’s praise!’ is a fitting response: to give our hearts and voices to Him who has redeemed and



**Jesus ... We can have no one greater to follow and to teach us how wisely, with wholesome speech, to use our tongue.**

saved us, for He is worthy of our praise. We have been brought back from captivity and our tongue has been filled with singing. *The Lord has done great things for us and we are glad.<sup>5</sup>*

*My heart is overflowing with a good theme;*

*I recite my composition concerning the King;*

*My tongue is the pen of a ready writer.<sup>6</sup>*

As the Lord closed the book of Isaiah in the synagogue in Nazareth, the eyes of all were fixed on Him. *And He began to say to them, “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” So all bore witness to Him, and marveled at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth.<sup>7</sup>*

The Lord is brought before us in Isaiah as the obedient and suffering Servant:

*The Lord God has given Me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak*

*a word in season to him who is weary.*

*He wakens Me morning by morning.*

*He awakens My ear ...<sup>8</sup>*

The ‘learned tongue’ comes from the listening ear. Jesus said, “... *learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart.*”<sup>9</sup> We can have no one greater to follow and to teach us how wisely, with wholesome speech, to use our tongue.

References: (1) Jas. 3:3-5,8 (2) Prov. 18:21 (3) Prov. 26:20 (4) Prov. 15:4 (5) Ps. 126:3 (6) Ps. 45:1 (7) Luke 4:21-22 (8) Is. 50:4 (9) Mat. 11:29

Bible quotations from NKJV



David

# Lover of God's Word

David Woods, Manchester, England

The Word of God was probably David's chief treasure.

Three times in Psalm 56 he wrote about God *whose word I praise*. Of course, the 'man after God's heart' was delighting in the God who gave him His Word! David recognized that through God's written Law, the Torah, and God's communication directly via the prophets and priests of his day (we'll say more about that later), he was able progressively to understand and appreciate God's greatness and thereby worship Him all the more. That's why he praised the Word of God and the God of the Word. Today, with a fully complete and entirely sufficient collection of God-breathed writings in our hands, we are challenged to respond as David did: worship is the expected outcome of our encounters with God through His Word.

For David, the written, preserved and handed-down Word of God equated principally to our first five books of the Old Testament. Through these Scriptures, David learned that God was the creator of all things; that sin entered the world through Adam's failure in the Garden of Eden; that God lovingly pursued mankind; that God intervened positively in the lives of the patriarchs; that God was gathering together a nation for Himself through their descendants and would bless all nations through them; that God had redeemed His covenant people out of Egyptian slavery; that God guided His people by giving them careful instructions relating to everyday life and worship ritual; that God brought His nation to the borders of the 'Land of Promise'.

In David's time, the nation of Israel had taken possession of the land and were fighting ongoing battles with their surrounding enemies to secure the inheritance. The promises David found in the Torah relating to the establishment of the nation of Israel in their own land



were a reality for him, being worked out visibly during his lifetime. Imagine the excitement with which he approached the Word of God! There is so much in Scripture to excite us about the God who delivers on His promises. Time and again we see promises fulfilled and, when we know there are purposes of God yet to be worked out, we can come to the Word of God today with a real sense of expectation, and search out the reality of these things as they impact our lives and circumstances.

David, prior to his rise to the throne, was a man who knew the Word of God well. His Psalms reveal his knowledge of the promises of God. He likely had a childhood where the commands of Deuteronomy 6:6-9 and 11:18-21 were honoured, providing a firm foundation for the rest of his life. The lesson is clear: sharing and learning the Word of God in family settings is vital to strengthen the faith foundations of our lives, and for directing our young ones in the way they should go, as life progresses. For many, a love for God's Word begins in the early years of life. Nurture this love in your home situation.

The Law that God had articulated to Moses revealed His high standards by which people were to live. It also provided structure for the life of the nation as a whole, as they lived under God's rule and authority. David, as king of Israel, and God's ruling representative, would have read the Law daily, if he was faithful to the command of Deuteronomy 17:18-19. Having written out his own copy of the Law (a significant task) and carrying it with him, he would be sure to know the standards by which God's people should be ruled. Daily reading of the Word of God is vital to know how to live for God, for His glory. If we're in a position of some authority, as David was, there's an even greater onus on us to be people of the Word, whose decisions and judgments are guided by God rather than prevailing culture.

The written Word of God was the centre and circumference of David's life. He repeatedly stated in his Psalms that he had lived righteously<sup>1</sup> as guided by



the Torah. But we know that David committed very serious sins (murder and adultery). Maybe he had fallen into the trap of perceived over-familiarity with the Word of God, and failed to maintain his daily reading discipline? Or possibly, he'd started to think that God's Word applied to others more than it did to him? We can have similar attitudes today, resulting in an unnecessary distance from God, and vulnerability to failure and hypocrisy. We must guard against this, and remain strong in our desires to meet personally with God through His Word, allowing Him to shape us and conform us to the image of His Son.<sup>2</sup> Let's encourage each other in this vital discipline!

During David's lifetime, the Word of God was also received orally as prophets transmitted it. Both Nathan and Gad are mentioned as delivering messages directly to David.<sup>3</sup> In addition, the high priest had a role in confirming the will of God in specific matters, enquiring of God on behalf of an individual.<sup>4</sup> David availed himself of this on several occasions.<sup>5</sup> Those were very active days in the receiving of the Word of God. Today, we have the great blessing of the complete Scriptures, and the work of the indwelling Holy Spirit to help us know the mind and truth of God.<sup>6</sup> Through the experiences of people like David we learn how to live for God.

We must not overlook the great contribution David made to the canon of Scripture. He was a skilled musician<sup>7</sup> and a prolific songwriter<sup>8</sup> and, under the hand of God,<sup>9</sup> was used to pen a significant number of songs that became part of the worship ritual of the people of God in Old Testament days. They feature prominently in the worship of God's people today too.

There's plenty of debate about the reliability of the 'superscriptions' of the Psalms and how much attention we should give to them. All of the manuscripts that are the basis of the Masoretic Text (the Hebrew text used for our Old Testament English translations) contain the superscriptions, so, with some caution, it's helpful to use them for guidance regarding authorship, date of writing and the circumstances associated with their writing.

The psalm superscriptions attribute 74 of the Bible's 150 psalms to David, with another one (Psalm 2) being attributed to him by Peter and John.<sup>10</sup> Bible scholars tell us that a superscription statement such as 'of David' can mean several things: that such a psalm was written directly by him, or it was written by one of his descendants, or someone else wrote it during the time that David lived. Taking these possibilities into account, and doing careful Bible study work, we can safely say that many of the psalms attributed to David have a consistent language style and form, and deal with very real experiences and situations corroborated by the narratives of 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 Kings and 1 Chronicles. This would support the view that David is most likely the direct author. His psalms reveal his reliance on God through his

various life situations and circumstances, and also his delight in God's purposes revealed through His Word.

Both Psalm 19 and 119 (assuming the latter contains sufficient internal evidence in terms of literary style and content to be attributed to David despite there being no superscription) are wonderful meditations on God's Word and the Law of the Lord. In Psalm 19, David employs various different Hebrew words to describe the various delights of the Torah, and the effects it has on those who respond to it accordingly. Psalms 119 and 56 (the Psalm we referred to at the beginning of this article), use the Hebrew word '*davar*' when describing the 'word' of God. It has a broader meaning, 'what is said relating to a matter', and probably refers to David's joy and delight in both the written and orally transmitted Word of God. His love for God's Word is clear to see in his Psalms!



David gave the Word of God priority and primacy in his life. He loved God because he loved His Word. He learned how to live for God by reading His Word. He was rebuked and corrected by His Word. He was restored and sustained by His Word. He ruled God's people by God's Word. He worshiped God because of the Word. What about us?

*All scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*<sup>11</sup>

References:

- (1) 2 Sam. 22:21,25; Ps. 7:8; 18:20,24; 26:1,11
- (2) Rom. 8:29
- (3) 1 Sam. 22:5; 2 Sam. 7:3-17; 12:1-15; 24:11-19
- (4) see Num. 27:21 for the origination of the practice
- (5) 1 Sam. 22; 1 Sam. 30:8; 1 Sam. 23: 2,4; 2 Sam. 5:19,23
- (6) John 16:13
- (7) 1 Sam. 16:14-23; 18:10-11
- (8) 2 Sam.23:1
- (9) Ps. 139:17
- (10) Acts 4:25,26
- (11) 2 Tim. 3:16-17

Bible quotations from ESV

# Marital relationships

David Webster, Liverpool, England

David is a man who is greatly commended by God.

Scripture records his trust in God when he fought Goliath of Gath<sup>1</sup> and tells us that God was with him.<sup>2</sup> Before taking important decisions it was David's life-practice to enquire of the Lord<sup>3</sup> and God protected him from King Saul.<sup>4</sup> David loved the things that God loved and had a heart for God.<sup>5</sup> He was faithful and lived a life of integrity and uprightness. David loved God's Word and set the course of his life to live according to what God said. But David is not presented to us in the Bible as a flawless character. He made mistakes and had blind-spots and yet God watched over him and blessed him.

The Bible records eight of David's wives and the children they bore David:

1	<b>Michal</b>	Younger daughter of King Saul	Remained childless <sup>6</sup>
2	<b>Ahinoam</b>	From Jezreel	A son, Amnon <sup>7</sup>
3	<b>Abigail</b>	Widow of Nabal of Carmel	A son, Kileab, also known as Daniel. <sup>8</sup>
4	<b>Maakah</b>	Daughter of Talmai, king of Geshur <sup>9</sup>	A son, Absalom; a daughter, Tamar. <sup>10</sup>
5	<b>Haggith</b>		A son, Adonijah. <sup>11</sup>
6	<b>Abital</b>		A son, Shephatiah <sup>12</sup>
7	<b>Eglah</b>		A son, Ithream <sup>13</sup>
8	<b>Bathsheba</b>	Widow of Uriah the Hittite	Sons, Shammua, Shobab, Nathan & Solomon <sup>14</sup>

We know very little about Haggith, Abital or Eglah. Some commentators equate Eglah with Michal, but this does not seem very likely. It seems there was, very probably, at least another wife of whom we know nothing at all because we read, *After he left Hebron, David took more concubines and wives in Jerusalem, and more sons and daughters were born to him*,<sup>15</sup> yet we only read of Bathsheba and her four sons. Only one daughter, Tamar, is recorded, though there were others.<sup>16</sup> And, in addition to the sons listed in the table, there were at least nine more!<sup>17</sup>

In addition to his wives, David also had a harem of concubines.<sup>18</sup> Concubines seem to be women of a lower

social rank who could not, for that reason, be classed as wives, but who were for all other purposes regarded as wives yet accorded less respect. For kings and men of high rank, however, possession of a harem of wives and concubines was a mark of wealth and status.

So in coming to look at King David's marital relationships we can see that

1. He was given **Michal**, daughter of Saul as his first wife, but almost immediately had to flee from the king, and Michal was given to Paltiel son of Laish.<sup>19</sup> Later, when David became king of Judah, and Ish-bosheth Michal's brother (and Saul's son) was king of Israel, David demanded her return to him, in return for peace between them. Despite the public protests of Paltiel, Michal returned to David.

2. During the years that he was on the run from King Saul, David married both **Abigail**, upon the death of her antagonistic husband, and also **Ahinoam** of Jezreel.<sup>20</sup> This wife should be differentiated from Saul's wife of the same name. Both Ahinoam and Abigail were with him in Gath.<sup>21</sup>

3. His marriage to **Maakah** was probably part of a political alliance with Talmai, an ally of David's.

4. He married **Haggith**, **Abital** and **Eglah** after being crowned King of Judah.<sup>22</sup>

5. Famously, David committed adultery with Bathsheba. Her resulting pregnancy and her husband's refusal to go along with David's plan to make it look as though he had fathered the child during a visit home from the frontline, where he served in David's army, led to David's order to have Uriah placed where he would be killed. Thereupon he married Bathsheba. These events form a spiritual low in the life of this great man.<sup>23</sup>

## Spiritual blind spots

We all have blind spots! So it is essential to keep listening to what God is saying to us. David loved God's Word, but followed the cultural norms and historical precedents for the time in which he lived. We need to take care that we don't blindly accept what our culture tells us is acceptable. The Lord Jesus, speaking to his disciples in the context of a discussion about divorce restated God's original one-man and one-woman intention regarding marriage: *"Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one flesh."*<sup>24</sup>



Furthermore God had expressly forbidden the king to take 'many wives'.<sup>25</sup> It can be a recipe for disaster.

Throughout human history great kings and lords have taken many wives and the resulting rivalry and in-fighting has been a major cause of wars, rebellion, bloodshed and treachery. David was to discover the truth of this from personal experience. Add to that favouritism, the inevitable absence of a king from the family, and court politics, and the tragedy of David's family is a disaster waiting to happen!

### Dysfunctional sons

His sons Amnon, Absalom and Adonijah were a problem to David, though he had a great affection for them. He seems to have left them largely to their own devices.

After the Bathsheba affair, the judgment from the Lord concerned his sons and family:

*"... 'Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own.' This is what the LORD says: 'Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity on you. Before your very eyes I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you, and he will sleep with your wives in broad daylight. You did it in secret, but I will do this thing in broad daylight before all Israel.'"*<sup>26</sup>

David's son and heir was **Amnon**. He is presented as a man who lusted after his half-sister, sulked because he could not have her and then made up an elaborate plot to get her into close proximity where he raped her. David was furious,<sup>27</sup> but did nothing. Two years later Amnon was killed by his brother Absalom as revenge for the rape and humiliation to his sister.

David also had a son who rebelled and tried to kill him. **Absalom** comes across as charming and popular, but coldly calculating and self-promoting. Absalom promoted his own claims to the throne by sowing disaffection for David his father and, by flattery, leading a rebellion which brought civil war to Israel and, as a public show of hatred and for political reasons *they pitched a tent for Absalom on the roof, and he slept with his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel*<sup>28</sup> – thus fulfilling the word of the Lord.

**Adonijah** seems to be a son who was handsome, never disciplined and who grew up to think he could do what he liked.<sup>29</sup> After the death of David's two eldest sons, he regarded himself as David's successor. When it became clear that David was nearing the end of his life, Adonijah, whose mother was Haggith, put himself forward and said, "I will be king." So he got chariots and horses ready, with fifty men to run ahead of him.<sup>30</sup>

But God had chosen Solomon as David's successor<sup>31</sup> and David had him proclaimed king, and the rebellion collapsed. Solomon pardoned his brother, but Adonijah seems to have learned nothing from this and still harboured ideas of being king. In his old age, a young woman, Abishag, was found for David to nurse him and



keep him warm. Seemingly she was viewed as one of his concubines – although they did not have sexual relations.<sup>32</sup> When Adonijah asked for Abishag to be his wife, Solomon saw immediately the veiled claim and had him executed.<sup>33</sup>

So David married many wives which led to jealousy and infighting. His failure to discipline his sons led to rape, rebellion and murder. His failure to restrain his own desires led to personal grief and tragedy. These, in turn, brought the kingdom to civil war and directly led to David's time of rejection and humiliation. God's grace, however, restored David and ensured that Solomon succeeded him as king.

### References

- (1) 1 Sam. 17:34-37 (2) 1 Sam. 18:28 (3) See 1 Sam. 30:8 (4) See 1 Sam. 19-24; 26 (5) Acts 13:22 (6) 2 Sam. 6:23 (7) See 1 Sam. 25:43; 2 Sam. 3:2; 1 Chron. 3:1 (8) See 1 Sam. 25; 2 Sam. 3:3; 1 Chron. 3:1 (9) Small Aramean city-state between Bashan and Hermon. It served as a buffer between Israel and Aram. David married Maakah, daughter of the king of Geshur, who became mother of Absalom (2 Sam. 3:3), which caused the two lands to be on friendly terms. Holman Bible Dictionary (10) See 1 Chron. 3:2,9 (11) See 2 Sam. 3:4; 1 Chron. 3:2 (12) See 2 Sam. 3:4; 1 Chron. 3:3 (13) See 2 Sam. 3:5; 1 Chron. 3:3 (14) See 2 Sam. 11; 1 Chron. 3:5 (15) 2 Sam. 5:13 (16) 1 Chron. 14:3 (17) See 2 Sam. 5:12-16 (18) See 2 Sam. 5:13; 2 Sam. 20:3 (19) 1 Sam. 25:44 (20) See 1 Sam. 25:39,43; 27:3 (21) 1 Sam. 27:3 (22) 2 Sam. 3:2-5 (23) See 2 Sam. 11 (24) Mat. 19:4-6 (25) Deut. 17:17 (26) 2 Sam. 12:10-12 (27) 2 Sam. 13:21 (28) 2 Sam. 16:22 (29) 1 Kin. 1:6 (30) 1 Kin. 1:5-6 (31) 1 Chron. 29:1 (32) 1 Kin. 1:3-4 (33) 1 Kin. 1:51-52; 1 Kin. 2:19-25

Bible quotations from NIV

## One-anothering

# Members of one another

Richard Hutchinson, Vancouver, Canada

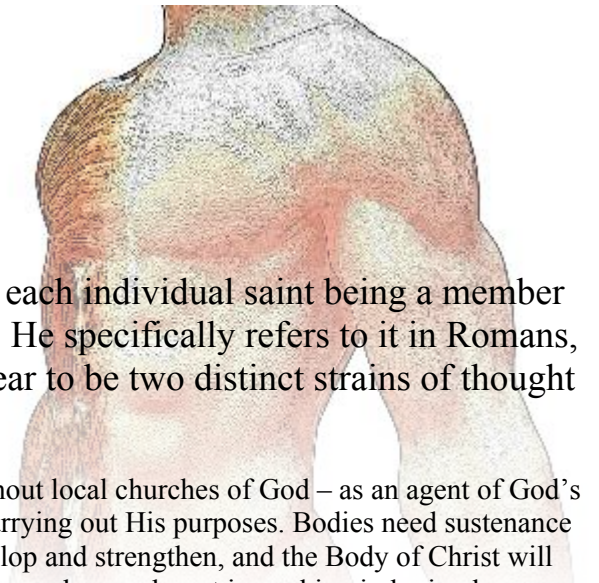
In a number of his epistles Paul uses the metaphor of each individual saint being a member of an organic whole, limbs and organs within a body. He specifically refers to it in Romans, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, and Colossians. There appear to be two distinct strains of thought that he uses the metaphor to emphasize.

In Romans 12:3-5, he is encouraging the saints not to consider themselves individually, putting weight upon their own talents and gifts, or to place any more emphasis on other people who have certain gifts, but to recognize that **all members of 'the body of Christ' have their function and role**, thus each is vital to the proper working of the body – a point revisited at length in 1 Corinthians 12.

We should draw strength from knowing we are each members of a vast network of millions who share the same faith and the same purposes and that, despite our differences, God is using the various members of 'the body of Christ' to glorify Himself throughout the world. We are privileged to contribute to that and it should encourage us in our service.

Each church of God is intended to be a local expression of that Body, and the lessons Paul emphasizes should be applied in that scope also. Do we consider how God has gifted others and how that might complement our own gifts in achieving God's will? We can too easily see ourselves as autonomous units ploughing our own furrow, frustrated at the inaction of others or their lack of vision, but it is essential to place our service within the context of those with whom we are members – in doing so we may encourage those who aren't as active, for whatever reason. If you feel you have no room to exercise your gift, or feel like you have no gift to employ, speak to your overseers and explain that you want to contribute and they should be able to recognize how best God can use you and allow you to grow.

In Ephesians 4, Paul is stressing the importance of the unity of the Body, and uses the commonality we have, being members of each other in the Body, as reason to consider how we treat one another. The saints are encouraged to deal honestly and speak the truth to their neighbour in verse 25 and in verses 31 & 32 Paul calls on them to let go of all malice, bitterness and anger, and instead to be kind, tenderhearted and forgiving. We are all members of one another, linked profoundly through Christ, and hurting each other only serves to injure the whole, whereas when each part is working properly, the body grows, building itself up in love.<sup>1</sup> **The purpose of a body is to grow and develop into a strong, functioning vehicle for agency.** For the Church, the Body of Christ, specifically, the purpose is to operate upon the earth –



throughout local churches of God – as an agent of God's will, carrying out His purposes. Bodies need sustenance to develop and strengthen, and the Body of Christ will only grow when each part is working in loving harmony, fulfilling its own role and allowing others to fulfil theirs.

Being members of one another should make us more conscious of our brothers and sisters in Christ. Their joy should be our joy and their sorrow our sorrow<sup>2</sup> to the point where we feel, through the depth of our concern, as bound by their circumstance as they do.<sup>3</sup> The love that Jesus Christ has for each member of His body should be flowing through us to them also, as we strive for the unity of the Body not only in doctrine (though we have a responsibility there too), but to be united in our love for each other with the aim that we *grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ*.<sup>4</sup> We can't do that without love, or by refusing to see the part others have to play. We are *one body in Christ, and individually members one of another*<sup>5</sup> – there is great encouragement and a stern challenge in meditating upon that.

References: (1) Eph. 4:16 (2) 1 Cor. 12:26-27; 2 Cor. 11:28-29 (3) Heb. 13:3 (4) Eph. 4:15 (5) Rom. 12:5  
Bible quotations from ESV

*Key Bible verses:*

***For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.*** (Rom. 12:4-5)

***... let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.*** (Eph. 4:25)

***... speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.*** (Eph.4:15-16)



# Affirmative, Captain?

Martin Jones, Toronto, Canada



The recent, unexpected death of the actor and comedian Robin Williams has put mental health issues firmly back on the social agenda, for a time at least. Such issues are extremely complex, but it seems clear that most people know someone who is struggling with who they are and what the future holds for them. Can the concept of ‘positive affirmations’ do anything to help?

## What are they?

Affirmations in ‘New Age’ and ‘New Thought’ are about positive thinking, self-empowerment and a belief that ‘a positive mental attitude supported by affirmations will achieve success in anything.’ An affirmation is a statement or formula which is supposed to be present tense, positive, personal and specific and that’s repeated to one’s self and/or written down frequently. Examples of these affirmations might include:

- I am getting better and better every day in every way.
- I am losing weight every day till I reach my ideal weight of 60 kilos.
- I am a money magnet and money flows into my life effortlessly.
- I am healthy and strong and I live life to the fullest.
- I am a good person who deserves success and happiness.

You might have come across this concept recently in the realm of sports psychology. People, like snooker player Ronnie O’Sullivan, have hired experts to help with the mental side of their game. Visualizing and verbalizing success is said to be a sure way to obtain it.

## Do they work?

Certainly there are a lot of people who say that they do. However, in a recent report,<sup>1</sup> positive affirmation has been found to have a detrimental effect on those who need it the most. Although those who already have high self-esteem feel slightly better and it acts as a buffer for constructive criticism that goes against their self-perception, when people with low self-esteem use positive affirmation, it rings untrue and therefore brings to mind exactly how they are not successful, loved, etc. In other words, it can backfire.

## Are they Biblical?

Proverbs 23:7 (NASB) seems to back up the importance of thought, *For as he thinks within himself, so he is.* Positive personal statements that aid the daily life of the individual are entirely Biblical and Scripture has quite a few of them, such as these examples:

- *I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.*<sup>2</sup>

- *I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day.*<sup>3</sup>
- *I have the right to do anything – but I will not be mastered by anything.*<sup>4</sup>
- *I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.*<sup>5</sup>
- *I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.*<sup>6</sup>
- *We will reap a harvest if we do not give up.*<sup>7</sup>
- *If we died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him.*<sup>8</sup>

Repeating these words and writing them down to emphasize personal ownership of them can only be a positive thing. Of course, the key difference in all this is that the source of strength that is supplied by these words comes not from ourselves, but from God. It is He who will make these things come to pass and it is He who will keep His promises. The value of affirming scriptural statements lies in bringing to mind God’s words as a stimulus to our faith. When we use biblical statements of faith in God Himself, such use is very far from the misguided ‘name it and claim it’ philosophy.

You can make your own scripture affirmations by using the myriad of promises that God gives us in His Word (being careful, of course, not to take them out of context), for example: “I do not let my heart be troubled because I trust and abide in Jesus”<sup>9</sup> – a similar idea to hanging a framed text on the wall or having a promise scripture on a bookmark. Where human affirmations might fail through a lack of self-belief or over-ambition, we are supplied with faith to see the reality of God at work in us and through us even when it may not always be visible.

*For no matter how many promises God has made, they are “Yes” in Christ.*<sup>10</sup>

References: (1) Kline, K. (n.d.). Association for Psychological Science. (2) Phil. 4:13 NASB (3) 2 Tim. 1:12 (4) 1 Cor. 6:12 (5) 1 Cor. 9:27 (6) 2 Cor. 12:9 (7) Gal. 6:9 (8) 2 Tim. 2:11-12 (9) See John 14:1 (10) 2 Cor. 1:20

Bible quotations from NIV unless stated otherwise

## Methods of Bible study

# Letting the Bible interpret itself

Karl Smith, Kirkintilloch, Scotland

The key to interpreting the Old Testament is the New Testament. Christ fulfilled the Law of Moses and is the saviour Messiah promised through the prophets and celebrated in the Psalms. The study of the Law should have highlighted Israel's need of this Saviour and, as we study it, we can marvel at the beauties of its justice, but also understand our inability to match up to the majestic holiness of God.

This was Paul's experience: *For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.*<sup>1</sup> This is why he describes it elsewhere as *our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ.*<sup>2</sup>

The Pharisees failed in their study of the Scriptures because they would not recognise that Christ was the key to it all. The Lord said to them, *"You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me."*<sup>3</sup> Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we are unlikely to make the same mistake.

Very often Old Testament Scriptures are quoted in the New. It is always helpful to see what the Lord or the apostles say about a verse from a tricky section of the Old Testament. For example, John looked at the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus on the cross and thought of the Passover lamb.<sup>4</sup> The fact that He died before the soldiers came to break His bones, reminded John of the commandment that *"...you shall not break any of its bones."*<sup>5</sup> This gives a vital clue that the details of the animal sacrifices of the Old Testament reveal aspects of the Lord's sacrificial death on the cross. In the next verse, John quotes Zechariah's prophecy about a time when people would *look on me, on him whom they have pierced.*<sup>6</sup> This shows that the person spoken of in this passage is indeed the Lord Jesus. Later in Revelation 1:7 John goes on to apply this to a time to come when others will look on Him with the same sense of awe, perhaps guilt, as the Roman centurion who looked on in John 19. With this key in mind, we suddenly understand that the last three chapters of Zechariah explain the realisation among the Jews in a time to come that Jesus was their Messiah after all, giving details about this wonderful turning point in their future that we wouldn't otherwise have. These – and other texts in the Scriptures – help to explain the large numbers of Israelites faithful to the Lord Jesus in the end times narrated in Revelation. God will take up His purposes with them when the Christians of this age are taken up into heaven. John's quotation of Zechariah also shows that the same prophecy may find its fulfilment in more than one event. The wonder of the Word of God is that

these meanings have been contained in it all along and the living person of Christ brings them out. There's not space to develop this here, but for the serious student of future events, a helpful explanation of how to approach the technicalities of prophetic texts can be found in George Prasher's book, 'A study of Prophetic Principles'. Here in the space of two verses in John 19, we see how the New Testament illustrated the method of studying both the offerings and of prophecy. The same is true of any other subject we may wish to follow through on.

This unfolding of the Lord's purposes can be seen in our study of the New Testament. The Lord Jesus' words were mainly spoken to Israel and have a special relevance to their national context both then and in the end times. The Gospel writers, however, and the epistles amplify how to apply his teaching in our (mainly Gentile) church age. The Acts show how to spread the Gospel and a model of church growth and structure that are normative for our time. The Epistles show what was – and what was not – desired in individual and church life. Whatever our need, God has provided for it. Moses said of the Law: *"it is no empty word for you, but your very life, and by this word you shall live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess."*<sup>7</sup> Let's get into it and live by it ourselves.

References: (1) Rom. 7:22-23 (2) Gal. 3:24 KJV (3) John 5:39 (4) John 19:36 (5) Ex. 12:46 (6) Zech. 12:10 (7) Deut. 32:47 Bible quotations from ESV



# Christ in the Gospels

## John's Christ

Greg Neely, Toronto, Canada

Five times in his gospel account John refers to himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved,<sup>1</sup> a description we could all properly apply to ourselves as those for whom He died, but one which shows that John's appreciation of Christ was very personal, very intense. At the same time, John states that the purpose of his writing is: *...that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.*<sup>2</sup>

John portrays Jesus as God the Son, but at the same time is the only writer to share Thomas' personal acknowledgement of Him as *"My Lord and my God!"*<sup>3</sup> Very deity; yet mine – ever so personal! Not a God who takes a distant view of His creation, but God become man to have intimate friends whom He loves. And John counted himself as one.

Jesus made seven 'I am ...' declarations in John's account, all of which John repeats to identify Him as the Word become flesh, and dwelling among us<sup>4</sup> for the purpose of a personal relationship with disciples whom He loves. He who is the "I AM" (Yahweh) of deity, is also described as:

The bread of life<sup>5</sup>; He satiates our hunger and quenches our thirst.

The light of the world<sup>6</sup>; He gives us the light of life.

The door of the sheep<sup>7</sup>; He gives us salvation and sustenance and protection.

The good shepherd<sup>8</sup>; He is our substitute, giving His life for the sheep.

The resurrection and the life<sup>9</sup>; He gives eternal life and eternal hope.

The way, the truth and the life<sup>10</sup>; He opens our access to God to live in a sanctified relationship.

The vine<sup>11</sup>; He enables us to bear fruit for Him.

For John, Jesus was always the exalted Jehovah, the 'I AM'. But He was also His best friend. Not only did He state His deity, He proved it by the seven signs John records and which he witnessed first-hand:<sup>12</sup>

The wedding at Cana where He changed water to wine<sup>13</sup> and manifested His glory.

The healing of the sick child of Capernaum's royal official<sup>14</sup> showing his power over illness, even from a distance of 20 miles.

The healing of the man at the pool of Bethesda<sup>15</sup> identifying Himself with His Father, His equal.

The feeding of five thousand men, plus women and children,<sup>16</sup> showing His creative powers.

Walking on the sea in a storm,<sup>17</sup> showing His power over His creation.

The healing of the man born blind<sup>18</sup> so that the works of God performed by Jesus might be seen in him.

The raising of Lazarus from the dead<sup>19</sup> showing Him to be the resurrection and the life.

Perhaps John's appreciation of Jesus as the Son, while also being his close, personal friend, was unique among the disciples in those early days. Perhaps that is why Jesus commended the care of His mother to John.<sup>20</sup> As an indication of John's love and devotion, when Peter was commanded by the resurrected Jesus to follow Him, Peter turned and saw *the disciple whom Jesus loved*



*following them.*<sup>21</sup> Peter needed to be told. John was already doing it! John's Christ, truly God, was John's deeply loved friend, truly man. And he would follow Him to the end.

I wonder if in our own day we can say the same.

All references from John's Gospel:

- (1) 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7,20
- (2) 20:31 (3) 20:28 (4) 1:14 (5) 6:35
- (6) 8:12 (7) 10:7,9 (8) 10:11
- (9) 11:25 (10) 14:6 (11) 15:1,5
- (12) 21:24 (13) ch. 2 (14) ch. 4
- (15) ch. 5 (16) ch. 6 (17) ch. 6
- (18) ch. 9 (19) ch. 11 (20) 19:27
- (21) 21:20

Bible quotations from NASB



## Pick-and-mix Christianity

# The Gospel according to ... you?

David Viles, Hayes, England

### “What is truth?”

A famous question from an infamous Roman governor.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, Pilate didn't stay long enough for an answer from his humble prisoner. Many people, perhaps most, in our frenetic society, similarly fail to give any real thought to this fundamental question – how disastrous and ironic, in the light of God's desire for everyone to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth.<sup>2</sup>

The Christian believer knows truth when he or she hears it. In that same Prisoner we discern the One who is the way, the truth and the life;<sup>3</sup> and because we (unlike Pilate) are of the truth our ears are attuned to His voice.<sup>4</sup> But ask anybody around us the same question and we're bound to get a bewildering variety of responses. Boiled down to the fundamentals however, they're likely to fall into one of two broad streams – truth is widely perceived (at least in Western society) either as the product of human reason – the application of intellect, the accumulation of the discoveries of science and technology; or (an increasingly common mind-set) truth is just what works for the individual or at a particular time, or in a particular culture. Although coming at the issue from different directions, both these popular positions stand in stark contrast to the Biblical concept of truth as absolute,<sup>5</sup> unchanging,<sup>6</sup> universal across all times and cultures<sup>7</sup> and revealed to (rather than discovered by) humanity.<sup>8</sup>

It is not surprising that these views are prevalent because it is the task of the great Adversary to obscure the light of truth, pandering to human pride which loves darkness rather than the light.<sup>9</sup> From the beginning, his purpose has been to cast doubt on divine truth – “*did God really say...?*”<sup>10</sup> – and human beings have been vain enough to swallow the bait. Equally, although the role of believers has always been to stand firm upon the truth of God *once for all entrusted to God's holy people*,<sup>11</sup> Christians are not immune to the blast of falsehoods and distortions emanating from the media and from the powerful dictates of popular culture. In Western societies, the departure from traditional values and assumptions, often founded on long-established Biblical truths, has become more akin to a rout, and the influence of popular attitudes to truth can be discerned even in current Christian witness and doctrinal interpretation. The unfortunate result has been the emergence in some evangelical Christian contexts of a curious ‘mix and match’ attitude to divine truth, blunting the effectiveness of Christians as ‘salt and light’<sup>12</sup> in a darkening world and undermining Christian testimony.

Again, no surprise – Paul warned of savage wolves entering in among the flock in his time.<sup>13</sup> Their teeth are no less sharp today, but in examining just three of the



modern attitudes to truth which can so easily devastate Christian witness we may see some familiar ‘wolves in sheep's clothing’.

### Truth decay: the enemies of truth

#### a) Pride

‘There is no reason that is so frequently adduced today for the rejection of the gospel as the fact that it is so old.’<sup>14</sup> The modern Western mind, steeped in the wonderful advances made by science and technology, widely regards them as offering the answer to every existential issue, rejecting the relevance of Bible truth to 21<sup>st</sup> century reality. The corroding effect of these assumptions on Christian witness is seen in the attitude of some Christians to the interfaces of, and distinctions between, divine truth and scientific hypothesis. The virgin birth of the Lord Jesus, for example, is widely questioned or even denied in Christian circles on the basis of its scientific implausibility. Such a view ignores the fact that God does not change and neither does His Word – it stands for ever.<sup>15</sup> It also opposes the assumptions of human intellect

and experience (themselves the gifts of an all-wise Creator) to the mind of God, whose thoughts and ways are far above ours in wisdom, knowledge and power.<sup>16</sup>

This is, of course, nothing less than pride – the arrogance of human intellect, the ‘triumph of reason’. And it is that old ‘wolf’ of pride which first led mankind to fall, which still causes people to worship the creature (human intellect) rather than the Creator<sup>17</sup> and which *comes not from the Father but from the world*.<sup>18</sup> Recognising that our omnipotent God stands above His creation, the believer humbly echoes the words of His Son – “*with God all things are possible*”<sup>19</sup> – even the virgin birth.

### **b) Partiality**

It is no understatement to say that the apostle Paul and his writings have generated more derision and controversy than most Biblical characters – try entering his name into a search engine! Since the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, liberal critics have sought to expose Paul as the ‘inventor of Christianity’, attempting in the quest of ‘the historical Jesus’ to divorce his teachings from those of the Lord he so singularly loved and served.

The Christian must be clear that this sustained denigration of Paul and partiality towards his writings really conceals a hidden agenda – to undermine the Pauline epistles as the inspired Word of God and to compromise the clarity and consistency of his presentation of the Lord Jesus as the Son of God.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, the effects have been insidious. Many Christians today would not wince at the assertion that, “Well, it was only Paul who wrote that”, as if his teaching is at best questionable and at worst unreliable. The resulting widespread ‘pick and mix’ approach to Paul’s writings is seen particularly in contemporary Christian attitudes to issues such as the roles and responsibilities of men and women in Christian worship and governance, and in marriage. Paul’s teachings on these matters are explicit and clear,<sup>21</sup> but they do not sit well with Western society. Again, this is nothing new; Paul faced sustained criticism about his spiritual credentials in his own time, not only from the Jews, but also from factions within the Churches he was responsible for founding,<sup>22</sup> and the answer then as now is to stand full-square on the Lord’s choice of this gifted man as the inspired apostle to the Gentiles.<sup>23</sup>

### **c) Personal definitions**

Under the headline ‘Jesus would let gay clergy wed’, a famous British pop star recently opined that Christ ‘was all about love and compassion and forgiveness ... and that is what the church should be about.’<sup>24</sup> This is inadequate upon so many counts, but reflects that modern mind-set which perceives truth not as an objective reality divinely revealed but as subjective, relative to particular cultures or circumstances and related to what seems to work or give pleasure. ‘If it doesn’t harm anyone and is based on love’ is a widespread definition of truth, which, again, has widely pervaded Christian circles. Recently, a well-known British church leader received widespread publicity when he said he no longer regarded same-sex

marriage as wrong, justifying his view on similar lines to the pop star – ‘Christ-like love’.<sup>25</sup>

The current struggles within so many denominations about homosexuality illustrate the pitfalls of a ‘pick and mix’ approach to Scripture, based on relative values focused on the individual; again, this is nothing new given the nadir – the lowest point – of Israel’s experience when *everyone did as they saw fit*,<sup>26</sup> abandoning God’s word as too difficult or inconvenient or ‘unloving’. The Bible unequivocally condemns homosexual relations as among those practices which are an abomination<sup>27</sup> to God and it cannot be an option for the Christian to accept what God hates. Love is not Christ-like love if it fails to draw attention to revealed truth for the good of the beloved; thus Jesus certainly forgave the woman caught in adultery, but He added, “*go now and leave your life of sin.*”<sup>28</sup>

### **Conclusion**

So, the choice is ours. What sort of Gospel do we preach – a personally-filtered, partial Christianity pandering to our pride and reflecting the insubstantial received wisdom of society: or contending vigorously for the truth without compromise as Paul and others did, declaring thereby the whole counsel of God?<sup>29</sup>

References: (1) John 18:38 (2) 1 Tim. 2:4 (3) John 14:6 (4) John 10:3-5; John 18:37b (5) Because God is absolute (Deut. 32:4 NKJV) (6) Ps. 100:5 NKJV (7) “*I am the ... truth ... No-one comes to the Father except through me.*” (John 14:6) (8) John 16:13 (9) John 3:19 (10) Gen. 3:1 (11) Jude 3 (12) Mat. 5:13-16 (13) Acts 20 :29 (14) M. Lloyd-Jones ‘Truth Unchanged, Unchanging’ (Bryntirion Press 2013) p. 90 (15) Is. 40:6-8; 1 Pet. 1:24-25 (16) Is. 55:8-9 (17) Rom. 1:25 (18) 1 John 2:16 (19) Mat. 19:26 (20) e.g. Eph. 1:3-12; Col. 1:12-19 (21) e.g. Eph. 5:22-33 on the marriage setting and 1 Tim. 2:9-15 for the Church setting (22) e.g. 1 Cor. 9:2-4, 2 Cor. 10:2-3 (23) Gal. 1&2 (24) London Metro 30 June 2014 (25) ‘Christianity’ February 2013 p.29 (26) Judg. 21:25 (27) Lev. 20:13 NKJV (28) John 8:11 (29) Acts 20:27

Bible references from NIV unless marked otherwise.



## Early heresies

# Monarchianism

Edwin Neely, Brantford, Canada

The errors of Monarchianism (from the Greek mono – one, and arche – rule) are misunderstandings about the nature of God that began in the second century A.D. They take several different forms, but the two main groups are:

1. The modalistic theory – that God is not a Trinity of Persons, but one Person operating in three different modes as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit alternatively, and
2. The dynamic monarchianist theory – that God is One, above all others indivisible and of one nature and that Jesus Christ was not co-eternal with the Father, but a man, who because of His perfect life, wonderful love and sinlessness was adopted by God at the time of His baptism or ascension, becoming God at one of those particular times.

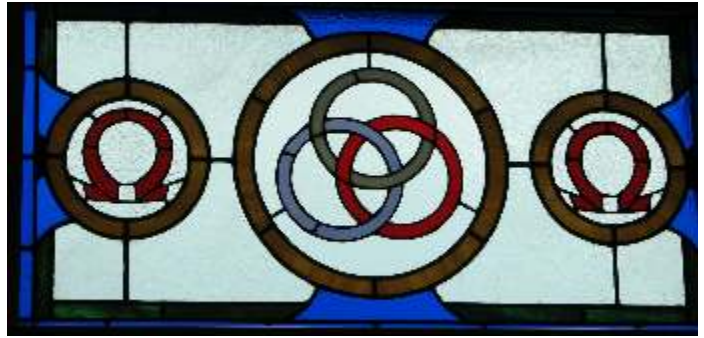
Those who accept these teachings also hold that the Holy Spirit is not a divine person, but a force or presence of the one God, the Father.

Emanuel Swedenborg in the early 1600s propounded a variation of modalistic monarchianism, asserting that God is one divine Person whose name is Jesus Christ.

Swedenborgianism, also known as The New Church or The Church of New Jerusalem is active in Canada and the USA today, but has a negligible presence in the UK. It believes that salvation does not come through the atoning work of Jesus Christ, but by the adherent practising faithfully whatever religion he accepts as true. In essence that means that it doesn't matter what one believes so long as one is faithful to one's own beliefs. In other words, man gets to declare his own rules for salvation, service and eternity. Other present-day adherents to modalistic beliefs are the Oneness Pentecostal groups known as United Pentecostals and the United Apostolic churches. Jehovah's Witnesses, Christadelphians and Unitarians hold to the dynamic monarchianistic viewpoint: Christ is not God the Son and the Spirit of God is nothing but an influence, a power of God for good.

It seems that wherever believers in God disagree with the clear teaching of Scripture their differences will centre on some aspect of the Lord Jesus Christ and salvation through faith in Him and His finished work at Calvary, Satan ever attempting to discredit and dishonour Him and make the work of Calvary of little or no effect and the gracious working of God the Spirit of little consequence.

But what does Scripture say? It is true that the 'Great Shema' of Israel plainly states "*Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!*"<sup>1</sup> and that, backed up by the Lord's own quoting of the verse in Mark 12:29, has been misinterpreted by many to discredit the teaching of the Trinity. It is true that while the Hebrew plural



'Elohim' of Genesis 1:1 does not necessarily insist on God being a Trinity, the Hebrew plural often signifying majesty of character rather than plurality of numbers, but it most certainly leaves room for the concept of a Trinity. New Testament Scriptures link the three persons as equal: each one is God indivisible, yet each separate from the other two. Matthew 28:19 shows them linked under one name, the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. The three are again linked by Paul: *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.*<sup>2</sup> Again in 1 Corinthians 12:4-6, when speaking of spiritual gifts, Paul links the three. Hebrews 10:29-31 shows the severity of punishment due to any who discredit the work of the Son and the Holy Spirit. And Peter in his first epistle<sup>3</sup> again displays the triune God working together in unity in connection with His New Testament people, speaking of the foreknowledge of God, the sanctification of the Spirit and the blood of sprinkling of Jesus Christ.

Scripture shows the Trinity to be co-equal, co-eternal and consubstantial. Monarchianism undermines the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ and likewise questions the existence of the Holy Spirit as a Person at all, much less one of the Trinity. John 1:1 shows Christ as one with God from eternity<sup>4</sup> and yet separate in personality, Himself God the creator of all things and life-giver apart from whom there can be no life nor life eternal. Thomas had the correct appreciation when he said of Christ: "*My Lord, and my God!*"<sup>5</sup> Even God the Father acknowledges Him on several occasions saying, "*This is my beloved Son*"<sup>6</sup> and again in Hebrews 1:8 the Father states: *But of the Son He says, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever."* Paul rightly described the Lord Jesus to the Colossians:<sup>7</sup> *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created... He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.* To this he adds: *For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form.*<sup>8</sup> The seriousness of believing otherwise is underlined by the Lord Himself in John 8:24: "*... unless you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.*" The result of that is seen in verse 21: "*... where I am going, you cannot come.*" Hebrews 1:3 linked with Philippians 2:6-11 should clinch the matter with regard to scriptural foundation: Jesus Christ is not only the Son of God; He is God the Son.

The Spirit, too, is God and a separate Person of the godhead. He displays all the attributes of personality: He is an advocate;<sup>9</sup> He is a comforter;<sup>10</sup> He has a mind;<sup>11</sup> He



can be insulted;<sup>12</sup> He can be lied to;<sup>13</sup> He exercises a will in accordance with the Father and the Son;<sup>14</sup> He delights in the depths of God and the Son, not only searching them, but revealing them to those who seek God in His Word.<sup>15</sup> God alone can be blasphemed, as He was, and the Spirit is outright called God in Acts 5:3-4, as He is in 2 Cor. 3:17-18: *the Lord, the Spirit*. He is eternal;<sup>16</sup> omnipresent;<sup>17</sup> omniscient;<sup>18</sup> God alone is good, and Neh. 9:20 calls Him God's good Spirit. Many more verses

might be added to declare His personality and His deity. What abundant grace on His part to dwell within us!

References: (1) Deut. 6:4 (2) 2 Cor. 13:14 (3) 1 Peter 1:2 (4) Micah 5:2 (5) John 20:28 (6) Mat. 3:17; Mat. 17:5 (7) Col. 1:15-17 (8) Col. 2:9 (9) Rom. 8:26 (10) John 14:16 (11) Rom. 8:27 (12) Heb. 10:29 (13) Acts 5:3 (14) John 16:13 (15) 1 Cor. 2:10-11 (16) Heb. 9:14 (17) Ps. 139:7,10 (18) 1 Cor. 2:10-11

Bible quotations from NASB

## Carrying burdens and holding onto truth

An interview with Samuel Geli, Davao, The Philippines

### *Samuel, please can you tell us how your story begins?*

I am the fourth son of the six children of my parents, and due to hardship in our home in Agusan del Sur, my older brother and I moved to Davao to find work. I was then 15 years old. While working selling chicken eggs, I studied at elementary level with the support of my older brother. When that was finished, my aunt took me to her house to work as a 'house boy'. In exchange, she supported me in my high school studies.

There, sadly, I was influenced by friends and began to drink fortified wine. But when I was in my fourth year of high school in 2012, I had a classmate, Michelle Tare, who was kind and friendly. At that time, she told me that she had been newly baptized and added in the Church of God in Davao. She told me she had learned so much from attending the Youth Camp of the Churches of God here in the Philippines. I was curious and asked her what they are. She taught me from Ephesians 2:8-9 that salvation is by God's grace through faith alone on our part. This was very different from what I'd been brought up to understand in our traditional filipino 'spiritist' beliefs. I am so grateful that I found the truth from the Bible through my classmate.

### *We heard your parents are strongly opposed to the Christian faith, so how did you react?*

When I told my parents about my decision to be baptized by immersion in water, my father became very angry (he was afraid that the spirits protecting our family would be upset). He told me I should not do this because I was already baptized. He threatened me that he would no longer assist me to obtain a college scholarship (the Government's special provision for indigenous peoples). But God's Word is clear that baptism is for those who have been born again (and not for infants). So, I chose to follow the correct way of baptism, and was added to the Church of God in Davao in November 2012. I am hoping that the time will come when my parents will realize that what I am following is the truth. I'm glad that at least my mother and my older sister respect what I believe. But my father is still far from happy even until now.

When I began college, I faced great challenges. My aunt turned me away from her house in Davao after she learned I was now in the Church of God. In fact, nobody in my family would support me. However, I was able to fully trust God's promise that He would never leave nor forsake me (Heb. 13:5). I found employment in the Davao market as a 'burden-bearer' from 2:00 am until 10:00 am. This involved carrying heavy baskets of fish, etc. Then from 1:00 pm to 8:00 pm, I attended college. I did this to support my college tuition costs and to rent the house where I now live. However, I had to quit that work because my boss did not allow me free time to worship on Sundays. So I next began work as a pump attendant in a gasoline station, but once again I was forced to quit because they, too, permitted no rest days on a Sunday. Just when I was about to give up, God touched the heart of someone in the Churches of God – and also their Relief Committee – to help me be able to continue my studies. I am very grateful to God for answering my prayers.

### *Can you give any message especially to all our young readers in Churches of God?*

The message I would like to give young people like me is we should never sell the truth we have discovered (Prov. 23:23). We should stand strongly against the problems we face, not forgetting that God will never leave us. We should have a thankful attitude for what we do have, and especially for what God has done for us through Christ.



## Mission

# Gospel Defenders

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At last, after many months of planning and preparation, the vision cherished for so many years finally came to fruition at the New Generation campsite, not far from the tourist resort town of Ocho Rios on Jamaica's north coast. The inaugural Gospel Defenders Youth Camp took place from 4-10 August 2014 and marked the establishment of what we pray will be an ongoing and God-glorifying work – an exciting new dimension in the ministry of the Church of God in Kingston, Jamaica.

With an enthusiastic team of workers from the Church of God in Kingston, and with the generous support of the North American District of the Churches of God, a total of 36 campers and 14 staff enjoyed the lush, tropical surroundings and superb facilities of the campsite. We spent a week with Bible study times, devotional ministry and praise centred on the theme of 'The Real Jesus', considering the man who changed the world two millennia ago and who is still changing lives today. From worshipping in a bamboo amphitheatre to the infectious enthusiasm of the local teens for every aspect of the daily programme, Gospel Defenders Youth Camp is truly a Jamaican camp experience that, with God's grace, will change the lives of many people, young and young-at-heart.

Each day began early (it's hard to sleep when even overnight temperatures rarely drop below 30°C) with a scriptural devotion from one of the young men, followed by an enthusiastic rendition of 'Bless The Lord, O My Soul', which quickly became the theme anthem of the

camp. Breakfast was traditional Jamaican fare, consisting of some combination of cornmeal porridge, ackee and saltfish, callaloo, boiled bananas and liver – or simple cereals with milk for the less adventurous amongst us! After an introductory talk, campers were assigned into groups and moved around various stations that tackled the daily topic with drama, video, discussions and team-building activities enabling each camper to really get to grips with the reality of our Saviour. A time of reflection from the campers each day revealed the value of this approach, with the variety of learning styles bringing out precious gems of encouragement from campers and staff alike. It was a pleasure to see the Holy Spirit so clearly at work in young hearts!

Afternoons were principally spent on the site's adventure course, cooling down at a nearby river (after a game of barefoot soccer), and the ever popular craft time. A special trip to a nearby beach gave Jamaicans and Canadian visitors alike a welcome chance to enjoy the warm waters of the stunning Caribbean. Evening praise and devotional ministry was held under the stars in an outdoor amphitheatre built into the jungle landscape, complete with a stage framed by giant bamboo stalks! The final camp-fire night provided opportunity for sharing campers' written testimonies, and powerfully demonstrated the impact that the week of camp had on all who attended. 'The Real Jesus' truly continues to change lives today and we gladly give Him all the praise and glory for such an amazing week of camp in Jamaica!