

Scripture Truth



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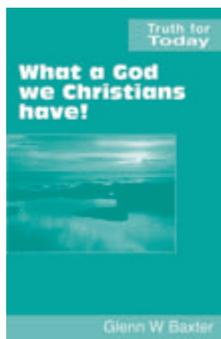
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What a God we Christians have!

by Glenn Baxter

Paperback; 208 pages; STP retail price: £7.00 + p&p



Containing a great mix of encouragement and challenge, these 17 talks very much represent the character of Glenn's ministry, which so many have enjoyed over the years. They deserve to be read with care and thought but, as might be expected, in so many cases they demand action. Without doubt, what Glenn would have looked for as his greatest legacy was not a book, but a generation of Christians sharing his excitement at “what a God we Christians have!”

Front cover: Ancient olive grove in the Galilee, Israel ©iStockphoto.com/pushlama (Noam Armonn)

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The anti-postmodernist Psalm

“With our tongue we will prevail; our lips are our own: Who is lord over us?” (Psalm 112:4).

The Bible was there before them. The above verse neatly characterises the influential modern belief that reality is haphazard, and is only organized into some sort of order by *words*. There are many ways in which the underlying reality could be organized; however each ordering which words impose on it possesses an internal coherence which creates meaning. No ordering is objectively superior to any other; however different orderings are the property of different groups, races, classes, and the like, and so form part of the struggle between these for power: winning the ideas battle is a means of winning other battles too. On the other hand, different orderings are also intermingled, in that one borrows from another, often unconsciously.

The above gives a rough idea of “postmodernism,” though this term may now be slightly dated, in part due to the successful fight-back of “modernism.” In this context “modernism” denotes the older humanistic idea that one particular “ordering” of reality demonstrably beats all the others, namely, the rationalist, evidence-based conception produced by the scientific method – a method, of course, which by assumption excludes God from its explanations. It is inconceivable that a humanity whose prosperity depends on science-based technologies could completely surrender to the idea that no one “world view” is better than any other. “Postmodernism” has had to reach an accommodation with “modernism.”

But in two spheres they agree anyway. Firstly, the moral: “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil; who put darkness for light and light for darkness,” said Isaiah (5:20). Modernist and postmodernist both believe that their words can shape moral reality as they please. But Psalm 12 predicted the result: “The wicked prowl on every side, when vileness is exalted among the sons of men” (v.12). And, secondly, the divine: both are sure “there is no God.” “...They speak loftily. They have set their mouth against the heaven, and their tongue walks through the earth” (Psalm 73:8-9).

Actually *God’s* words precisely ordered reality: “He spoke, and it was done” (Psalm 33:9). Its stability proves that it is far from haphazard: “He commanded and it stood fast.” Let us always bear Psalm 12:6 in mind, “The words of the LORD are pure words, like silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times...”

Final perseverance

A dangerous doctrine?

C.H. Mackintosh

A professing Christian pursuing an immoral course once shrugged his shoulders and said, "So what? I have eternal life and shall never perish." What chilling words! With them in mind I reprint this abridgement of an answer to a correspondent that appeared in Mackintosh's magazine, Things New and Old, in 1862, and subsequently in vol. I of his Miscellaneous Writings. "Final perseverance" means "eternal security."

The question of final perseverance, though in our judgment a very simple one, has perplexed a great many. In seeking to reply to your interesting letter, we have three things to do, namely, first, to establish the doctrine of final perseverance, or in other words the security of all Christ's members; secondly, to answer the questions you have given us, and which we take to be those usually or frequently put by the opposers of the doctrine; and, thirdly, to expound the texts which you have quoted, and in which you seem to find considerable difficulty.¹ May the Holy Spirit be our teacher, and may He give us minds entirely subject to Scripture, so that we may be able to form a sound judgment on the question now before us.

Christ's perseverance, not ours

And first, as to the doctrine of final perseverance. It seems to us exceedingly clear and simple, if only we look at it in immediate connection with Christ Himself. This indeed is the only true way to look at any doctrine. A doctrine separated from Christ becomes a lifeless, worthless dogma – a mere idea in the mind – a mere item in the creed. Therefore, we must look at every truth as it stands connected with Christ. We must make Him our point of view. It is only as we keep near to Him, and look at all points from that one grand point, that we can have a correct view. If, for example, I make self my point of view, and look from thence at the subject of final perseverance, I shall be sure to get a false view altogether, inasmuch as it then becomes a question of *my* perseverance, and anything of *mine* must, necessarily, be doubtful.

But if on the other hand I make Christ my viewing point, inasmuch as it then becomes a question of Christ's perseverance, I am quite sure that no power of the world, the flesh, or the devil can ever hinder His final perseverance in the salvation of those whom He has purchased with His own blood, seeing "He is able also to save them *to the uttermost* that come unto God by him" (Hebrews 7:25 KJV).

¹ This third part is omitted from this reprint.

This, surely, is final perseverance. It matters not what the difficulty, or what the hostile power may be; “He is able to save to the uttermost.” The world with its ten thousand snares is against us; but “He is able.” Indwelling sin in its ten thousand workings is against us; but “He is able.” Satan with his ten thousand devices is against us; but “He is able.” In a word, it is Christ’s ability, not ours; Christ’s faithfulness, not ours; Christ’s final perseverance, not ours. He has purchased His sheep, and surely He will keep them to the best of His ability; and seeing that “All power is given unto [Him] in heaven and on earth” (Matthew 28:18), His sheep must be perfectly and for ever safe.

Thus it is immensely important to consider the question of final perseverance in inseparable connection with Christ. Difficulties vanish. Doubts and fears are chased away. The heart becomes established, the conscience relieved, the understanding enlightened. It is impossible that one who forms a part of Christ’s body can ever perish; and, “We are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones” (Ephesians 5: 30). Hear what our Lord Jesus Christ says: “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give unto them *eternal* life, and they shall never perish, neither shall *any* [man, devil, or any one else] pluck them out of my hand. My Father which gave them me is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand” (John 10: 27-29).

Here, then, most assuredly, we have final perseverance; and that, moreover, not merely of the saints, but of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, of the Holy Trinity. It is the perseverance of the Holy Ghost in opening the ears of the sheep [“My sheep *hear* my voice.”]; of the Son, in receiving all whose ears are thus opened; and of the Father, in keeping, through His own Name, the blood-bought flock in the hollow of His everlasting hand (John 17:11).

Salvation is of the Lord

This is plain enough. We see no middle ground. “Salvation is of the Lord” (Jonah 2:9) from first to last.



*It is
Christ’s
ability,
not ours;*

*Christ’s
faithfulness,
not ours;*

*Christ’s
final
perseverance,
not ours.*





Counterfeit conversions may take place.

True believers may stumble and have ample cause for humiliation.

The precious doctrine of final perseverance remains unshaken.



It is free, unconditional, everlasting salvation. It reaches down to where the sinner is in all his guilt, ruin and degradation, and bears him up to where God is in all His holiness, truth, and righteousness. It is all of God from beginning to end, from foundation to top-stone, from everlasting to everlasting. If it were not so, it would be presumptuous folly to speak of final perseverance; but, seeing it is so, it would be presumptuous unbelief to think of aught else.

True, there are great and manifold difficulties in the way – difficulties before, and difficulties after, conversion. There are many and powerful adversaries; but that is the very reason why we must keep the question of final perseverance entirely clear of self and all its belongings, and make it repose simply upon God. It alters not in the least what the difficulties or the adversaries may be, for faith can ever triumphantly enquire, “If God be for us, who can be against us?” And again, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth nor *any other creature*, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:35-39).

No doubt persons may be deceived, and they may deceive others. Spurious cases may arise; counterfeit conversions may take place. Persons may seem to run well for a time and then break down. The blossoms of spring-time may not be followed by the mellow fruits of autumn. Such things may be; and moreover true believers may fail in many things. They may stumble and break down in their course. They may have ample cause for self-judgment and humiliation. But, allowing the widest possible margin for all these things, the precious doctrine of final perseverance remains unshaken – yea,

untouched – upon its own divine and eternal foundation. “I give unto my sheep *eternal* [not temporary or conditional] life, and they shall *never perish*.” And again, “Upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18). People may argue as they will, and base their arguments on cases which have come under their notice from time to time; but, looking at the subject from a divine point of view and basing our convictions on the sure and unerring word of God, we maintain that all who belong to the “us” of Romans 8:39, the “sheep” of John 10:27, and the “church” of Matthew 16:18, are as safe as Christ can make them, and this we conceive to be the sum and substance of the doctrine of final perseverance.

Shall we continue in sin...?

And now, dear friend, we shall, in the second place, briefly reply to the questions which you have put before us.

1. “Will a believer be saved, no matter into what course of sin he may fall, and die in?” A true believer will, infallibly, be saved; but we consider that salvation includes, not only full deliverance from the future consequences of sin, but from the present power and practice thereof. And, hence, if we find a person living in sin, and yet talking about his assurance of salvation, we look upon him as an antinomian,² and not a saved person at all. “If we say that we have fellowship with him and walk in darkness, we lie and do not the truth” (1 John 1:6). The believer may fall, but he will be lifted up; he may be overtaken, but he will be restored; he may wander, but he will be brought back, because Christ is able to save to the uttermost, and not one of His little ones shall perish.

2. “Will the Holy Spirit dwell in a heart where foul and unholy thoughts are *indulged*?” “The body of the believer is the temple of the Holy Ghost” (1 Corinthians 6:19). And this precious truth is the solid ground of exhortation to purity and holiness of heart and life. We are exhorted not to grieve the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:30). To “indulge” evil and unholy thoughts is not christian walk at all. The Christian may be assaulted, grieved, harassed, by evil thoughts, and in such a case he has only to look to Christ for victory. Proper Christian walk is thus expressed in John’s First Epistle, “We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not” (1 John 5:18). This is the divine side of the question. Alas! we know there is the human side likewise; but we judge the human side by the divine. We do not lower the Divine to meet the human, but ever aim at the divine notwithstanding the human. We should never be satisfied with anything lower than 1 John 5:18. To talk of having the Spirit, and yet *indulge* in evil and unholy

² I.e., a lawless person (cp. 1 John 3:4), one who lives in deliberate defiance of the claims of God.

thoughts, is, in our judgment, the ancient Nicolaitanism (Revelation 2:6, 15) or modern antinomianism.

3. “[If we have eternal security] will not people say that they may live as they like?” Well, how does a true Christian like to live? As like Christ as possible. If one had put this question to Paul, what would have been his answer? 2 Corinthians 5:14, 15 and Philippians 3:7-14 furnish the reply. It is to be feared that the persons who ask such questions know but little of Christ. We believe that the man who draws a plea from the freedom, sovereignty, and eternal stability of the grace of God to continue in sin (cp. Romans 6:1) knows nothing of Christianity at all, has neither part nor lot in this matter, but is in a truly awful and dangerous condition.

As to the case which you adduce, of the young man who heard a minister stating in his sermon that, “Once a child, always a child,” and who took occasion from that to plunge into and continue in open sin, it is only one of thousands. We believe the minister was right in what he said, but the young man was wrong in what he did. To judge the words of the former by the acts of the latter is utterly false. What should I think of my son, if he were to say, “Once a son always a son, and therefore I may proceed to smash my father’s windows and do all sorts of mischief”? We judge the minister’s statement by the word of God, and pronounce it true. We judge the young man’s conduct by the same rule, and pronounce it false. The matter is quite simple. We have no reason to believe that the unhappy young man ever really tasted the true grace of God, for if he had, he would love and cultivate and exhibit holiness. The Christian has to struggle with sin; but *struggling* with it and *wallowing* in it, are two totally different ideas. In the one case, we can count on Christ’s sympathy and grace; in the other, we are actually blaspheming His name by implying that He is the minister of sin.

We consider it a very serious mistake to set about judging the truth of God by the actings of men. All who do so must reach a false conclusion. The true way is just to reverse the order. Get hold of God’s truth first, and then judge everything by that. Set up the divine standard and test everything thereby. Set up public scales and weigh every man’s load therein. The scales must not be regulated by each man’s load, but each man’s load tested by the scales. If ten thousand professors were to fall away, and live and die in open sin, it would not shake our confidence in the divine doctrine of final perseverance. The selfsame word that proves the doctrine to be true proves them to be false. “They went out from us, but they were not of us: for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us” (1 John 2:19). “The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity” (2 Timothy 2:12).

The baptism in the Spirit

What does it mean?

David Anderson

Non-“charismatic” exposition of “baptism in the Spirit” has generally majored on what this phrase does not mean. This article majors on its clear positive implications for church life.

There is no doubt from the narrative in Acts that the two occasions on which the Spirit was poured out, at Pentecost and at Caesarea (Acts 2:1-4; 10:44-48), answer to what John Baptist foretold (Luke 3:16; John 1:33) and to what the Lord promised (Acts 1:5). And therefore they constitute what Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:13 calls the baptism in the Spirit.¹ That is why in this last verse Paul includes Gentiles (here denoted Greeks) as well as Jews. To paraphrase his statement:

“By one Spirit all believers were baptised into one corporate body. For Jewish believers this occurred on the day of Pentecost; and for Gentile believers it happened when Peter preached in Cornelius’ house at Caesarea. But all believers, whether then or now, individually partake/drink of the one same Spirit and so have been incorporated into the one church of God”.

In Old-Testament times God set Israel apart from all other nations (Exodus 19:5,6), so that mankind had this primary, divinely ordained division within it: between Jews and Gentiles. The ancient world as a whole would

have seen another primary division: between slaves and freemen. By contrast the church of God was formed of believers from all nations, whether Jews or Gentiles by birth; and people from all stations in life, whether slaves or freemen. All were livingly united to each other by the Spirit. All distinctions of race and status were removed by the baptism of the Spirit. Therefore I conclude from 1 Corinthians 12:13 that the baptism in the Spirit was not solely an individual event but very much a *corporate* event, that is, an event by which a corporate entity, the church, was brought into being. Each believer became interrelated to each other and together they composed a single unit, the church. Paul explains this in verse 12. “For just as the [human] body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ” (ESV). The Darby translation ends verse 12 with the phrase “so also is the Christ”. In reality, the church is Christ as Head with believers making up His body. Not only are they livingly attached to each other, they are also livingly linked to

¹ On this see the writer’s article, “The Baptism of the Spirit: promised and realised”, in the January issue of *Scripture Truth*.

their Head in heaven by the Spirit; see Ephesians 4:15 & Colossians 1:18.

But what about believers since those initial days of the church's formation: what about today's Christians? The answer is that once the early church was formally established, a person who believes the Gospel receives the gift of the Holy Spirit immediately upon believing. "In [Christ] you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in Him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit" (Ephesians 1:13); and, "we [received] the promised Spirit through faith" (Galatians 3:14). In these two verses the "sealing of the Spirit" and "receiving of the Spirit" are equivalent to "being made to drink of the Spirit" in 1 Corinthians 12:13.

1 Corinthians 12:13 also means that all believers are equal – all have drunk of, or "imbibed", that one Spirit. As Paul states in Galatians 3:28, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." However, each individual believer is a distinct member of the body of Christ, just as in the human body there are different parts. "For the body does not consist of one member but of many" (1 Corinthians 12:14).

"Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it" (12:27).

At one point in history, then, at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came both upon, and to reside in (cp. John 14:17) every believer present, thus uniting each with Christ and with all the others, and so forming the church. All the rest of us believers come into this when we are saved, and are sealed with the Holy Spirit.

But what is the significance of the *Holy Spirit* being the Agent of this work of uniting believers? It means that everything concerning the constitution of the church is spiritual in nature, that is, originating from the Holy Spirit. Therefore, its activities are to be directed by Him (1 Corinthians 12:11). By being baptised into the Spirit, the distinctions of nationality (Jew and Gentile), by which God Himself organised human society, and of status (slave or free), by which humanity itself organised human society, have been done away between believers, and are submerged by the Spirit. Therefore, the church is not a human organisation. Neither does it depend on man's natural abilities or gifts to function. Everything in church should be by the activity and enabling of the Holy Spirit. Verses 4-7 are a key section of the chapter:

.....
*Everything concerning the constitution of the church is
originating from the Holy Spirit.
Therefore, its activities are to be directed by Him.*

Every member has their own part to play, but is also dependent upon every other member in the church.

.....

“There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good [i.e., of the church]”.

It helps to see how Paul expanded upon these statements.

- “There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit” is explained in vv.7-11. In summary they mean that a variety of capabilities to serve are given by the gracious ministry of the Spirit.
- “There are varieties of service, but the same Lord” is explained in vv.12-27. These verses show that there are many forms of service under the headship of Christ.
- “There are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who is working” is explained in vv.28-31.

This last statement can be literally rendered, “There are different workings but the same God who is working.” This implies not only variety, but also integration of this variety so as to work as a harmonious whole. Three important verses bring this out:

- First of all, verses 18 & 19 say that, “God arranged the members in the body [of Christ], each one of them,

as He chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be?” God sovereignly did this by the baptism in the Spirit as we learnt from vv.11-14. The practical effect of this is that every member has their own part to play, but is also dependent upon every other member in the church. Verses 15-21 elaborate on the impossibility of self-sufficiency for the Christian believer – the foot, ear, eye, etc. cannot opt out of the body!

- Secondly, verse 24 says that, “God has so composed the [human] body, giving greater honour to the part that lacked it.” This verse is referring to the human body to draw a lesson for the church – “that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together” (verses 25-26). Whilst it is always good that care and concern are shown for the worldwide or global church, Paul insists it should be an evident feature of the local church. In v.27 he emphatically and directly does this. “Now you [Corinthians] are the body of Christ and individually members of it.”

- Thirdly, verse 28 says that, “God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues.” Here is the divine working in all the diverse “workings”! (cp. verse 6b) However here Paul means the global church in its entirety, rather than just the global church at this present time or even a local church. He is referring back to verses 12-13 and to how God set up the entire church by the baptism in the Spirit. Ephesians 2:20-22 teaches that the whole church, which consists of all believers from Pentecost to the rapture, is built on the foundations of the apostles and prophets and is continually growing into a temple, which will ultimately be the eternal dwelling place of God through the Spirit. All the gifts there have ever been in the church, and when used under the direction of God by the Spirit, have contributed to this growth.

Practical Applications

There are some searching practical consequences of the baptism in the Spirit. The most important one is that genuine concern and care for each member must be seen in my own local assembly. We can so easily be diverted

into questioning what gifts are evident in our assemblies and how they compare with other churches or fellowships known to us! But God has placed me where I am in a local Christian fellowship. To paraphrase verse 27, “your local assembly is to be a microcosm, or miniature expression, of the whole body of Christ. You are all individually interdependent members of it.” Does my ecclesiastical set-up allow for the Spirit of God working freely and directing all our activities as He wills? What gifts have I received from the Spirit? In this respect, verse 8 lists things to say in church and vv.9-10 list things to do. Verses 29-30 make the obvious point that there is diversity as well as unity of the body of Christ, which means we will not all exhibit the same gifts of the Spirit! The start of verse 31 rounds off the chapter with a challenging directive to “earnestly desire the higher gifts,” whilst it ends insisting there is “a still more excellent way.” Supremely, it’s the way of love which is to be manifested in church. After describing the features of love in chapter 13, Paul returns to its practice in the local church. “Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy” (14:1). Challenging issues for all of us!



We will not all exhibit the same gifts of the Spirit!

Psalm 117

Universal praise

John Weston

“O praise the LORD all ye nations: praise him, all ye people. For his merciful kindness is great toward us: and the truth of the LORD endureth for ever. Praise ye the LORD” (KJV).

“This psalm, which is very little in its letter, is exceeding large in its spirit; for bursting beyond all bounds of race or nationality, it calls upon all mankind to praise the name of the Lord.”¹

Here, for the first time in the hallel psalms, the call goes out to the nations to praise the Lord.

“Let all the world in every corner sing
‘my God and King!’
The Church with psalms must shout,
no door can keep them out:
but, above all, the heart
must bear the longest part.
Let all the world in every corner sing
‘my God and King!’”²

This, surely, expresses what would be a fitting reflection as the celebration of the Passover draws to a close. Throughout the evening the attention has been given to gratitude for their own liberation, but now they lift up their eyes to the world at large.

“O praise the Lord, all ye nations: praise Him all ye people.” Certainly, the day is coming when every knee will bow before the Lord, and every tongue will confess that He is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:10-11). This millennial celebration is what the psalm truly voices. Yet in a somewhat similar sense, it can apply to believers as they participate in the Breaking of Bread. Throughout the meeting, the worship has centred on the amazing

¹ C.H. Spurgeon, *Treasury of David* (London, 7 vols., c. 1870-1886), vol. 5, p.317.

² George Herbert, 1593 - 1633.

love of God and the greatness of the cost of our redemption. We are full of praise to our Saviour for his sacrificial love. But as our time draws to a close, we, too, lift up our eyes to those fields that “are white already to harvest” (John 4:35). We pray that through the proclamation of the Good News, many across the world will come to faith, and that there will be a mighty outpouring of praise.

However, in these days the darkness is closing in. Christians are being persecuted for their faith, even in our own country. The darker it gets, the greater and louder should be our songs of praise! This is even more imperative as we see the days approaching when Christian witness will be withdrawn from the world.

And so, in accord with Psalm 117, let us lift up our voices, and cry out, “HALLELUJAH” - praise the LORD!

*We are full of praise
to our Saviour
for his sacrificial love.*

*The darker it gets,
the greater and louder
should be our songs of praise!*

Alpha people

Felix

George Stevens

Continuing our irregular series on some lesser characters in the Scriptures.

“And when Felix heard these things, having more perfect knowledge of that way, he deferred them, and said, When Lysias the chief captain shall come down, I will know the uttermost of your matter... And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ” (Acts 24:22, 24-25).

Felix’s record

Although the name “Felix” means “happy” or “prosperous,” the Felix of the Bible did not live up to his name. He governed Judaea from c. A.D. 51 to 60, though he was a freedman, i.e., a slave who had acquired his liberty. His governorship was marked by injustices and brutality which inflamed the passions that led to the Great Jewish War of A.D. 66-70. He brutally suppressed an insurrection led by a Jewish Egyptian whom Josephus calls a “false prophet;” shortly afterwards Lysias mistook Paul for this “Egyptian” (Acts 21:38).

He also induced a Jewess, Drusilla, who was a daughter of the king Herod of Acts 12:1ff, to desert her husband and marry him. This mar-

riage not only gave him the knowledge of Jewish belief, but also made him quite conversant with “the Way”, i.e. with the faith of the followers of the Lord Jesus (v.22). When Paul was brought before him and accused of sedition and heresy, Paul was able to emphasise that the God he worshipped was the God that his Jewish ancestors had worshipped, and that he fully believed the Scriptures of Israel, including the hope of resurrection. And yet, he said, on account of the resurrection he was now standing trial (24:14,15,21).

Felix as judge

As governor, Felix was supreme judge in Judaea, just as Pontius Pilate had been before him. Paul acknowledged Felix’s right to judge and paid him the due respect (24:10). Felix’s knowledge of the Christian “way” seems initially to have induced him to try to judge righteously, for he insisted on deferring judgement until he heard directly from Lysias, the “chief captain” who had been on the spot when Paul had nearly been lynched in the temple courtyard (v.22; cp. 21:30-33; 23:26). But Felix was also

*Paul took his opportunity
to confront Felix with himself and with God.*

.....

corrupt. He hoped that by keeping Paul imprisoned, he would be bribed in order to release him. Therefore, he called for and talked with Paul often. As Christians, may we be honest before all. And Felix was a man-pleaser. This is shown by the fact that he, willing to shew the Jews a pleasure, left Paul's case hanging, and Paul himself a prisoner, until Porcius Festus arrived two years later as his successor. May we always seek to please the Lord and not men (24:26-7).

Felix trembles

After the initial public trial Felix came with his wife Drusilla, and sent for Paul, who witnessed to the Christian faith (24:25). Paul "reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come." From what we have seen of Felix's public and private character, we conclude that Paul, no doubt courteously, took his opportunity to confront Felix with himself and with God. This gospel-boldness takes our breath away! But it had at least some

effect: "Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee" (v.25). The word "trembled" means, "became afraid." Yet fear was not enough to bring this man, too deeply enmeshed in private sin, too afraid of the consequences of admitting public misgovernment, this ambitious social climber, to repentance and faith in Christ. There is no record of Felix being saved. The "convenient season" never came to the man who could not face up to the gospel. He procrastinated to his eternal loss for, "Now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation!" (2 Corinthians 6:2)

If you haven't repented of your sins and put your trust in Christ, do so today – right now – through a simple prayer to God. Commit your life into his hands, believing that His Son has borne the punishment for your sins; because the old saying is right: "The way to hell is paved with good intentions."

.....

*The "convenient season" never came.
"Now is the accepted time;
behold, now is the day of salvation!"*

Joseph the husband of Mary

An example to fathers

Peter Ollerhead

Joseph was a righteous man (Matthew 1:26). But it is how this verse continues that is really telling. May we all, not only fathers, learn from this insightful study of the small information we have about him.

Amongst the lesser-known characters of the New Testament is Joseph, the husband of Mary. What can we learn from the few references in the Gospels to this often-ignored and pious man who was chosen by God to provide the earthly care for the Lord while He was a child growing into manhood?

Entrusted with Messiah

Joseph was from the line of David, the great king of Israel. The last verse of the genealogy in Matthew 1 states, “And Jacob begat Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ” (v.16, KJV). The first of two important details to be noticed in this verse is that Joseph’s marriage to Mary constituted our Lord as legitimately part of the Davidic line, because the Messiah must be part of the lineage of David, the heir to the promises and distributor of divine blessings to the Gentiles. The apostle Paul also stresses the importance of this in the first chapter of his Letter to the Romans: “Concerning his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who was made of the seed of David according to the flesh” (v.4).

That Jesus was the Christ, or Messiah, remains an element of the Gospel preached by the apostles. One illustration of this is when Paul told the Philippian jailer that he must believe on the Lord Jesus Christ to be saved (Acts 16:31). Paraphrasing, we might say he had to “Believe that Jesus is Lord and Messiah.”

Entrusted with the Son of God

The second important detail in Matthew 1:16 is that it states that Joseph was the husband of Mary, not that he “begot Jesus.” This is despite the fact that “begot” is used in all the other intergenerational relationships mentioned in the genealogy. I trust all the readers of *Scripture Truth* hold to the integrity of the incarnation of the Lord Jesus as revealed to us in the Scriptures.

A kind man

From Luke 1: 39-40 we gather that after the angel Gabriel had told Mary that she would bear a child, she departed in haste to a city of Judah in the hill country, to the home of Zacharias and Elizabeth. When she returned, “she was found with child of the Holy Ghost” (Matthew 1:18). It is obvious that Joseph was very upset when he learned that his betrothed, who had abruptly departed for the hill country some weeks before, was pregnant when she returned. Most men in the same



*Most
important
must be
obedience
to the
voice of
God.*



*Joseph in
humility
obeyed the
instructions
of the
angel.*



circumstances would also have been deeply distressed. Even then Joseph did not publicly disown her, but intended to deal with the matter privately and “in house.” This says much both for the deep affection that Joseph must have felt for the young woman, and also for the gracious character of the man who worked as a lowly carpenter (Matthew 13:55).

Matthew 1:20-24 tell us how Joseph had a change of mind that led to reconciliation with Mary. “...Behold an angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost...” Again, the relationship between Joseph and king David is brought out in the passage, further consolidating the link emphasised previously regarding Jesus’ place in the line of the Davidic Messiah.

His obedient spirit

Despite his distress when Mary told him of her condition, Joseph responded to the instructions of the angel as communicated to him in the dream (v.24). He did not waste any time either, for the Scripture states that he took her as his wife on being raised from sleep. Of the many lessons that we can learn from the example of Joseph, the most important must be obedience to the voice of God when He speaks to us through His word. Speaking personally, however, obedience is the last lesson that is learnt.

Matthew’s Gospel also informs us that Joseph was told by the angel the name that Mary’s baby was to be called; and he was “not disobedient to the heavenly vision,” in that he positively acquiesced in the naming of Jesus (1:25). One of his sons born in later years was called Joseph (Mark 6:3). Even if Joseph had wished to name Jesus after himself, he did not do so, but in humility obeyed the instructions of the angel. This is yet further evidence of the obedient spirit that marked this humble man who was to have the earthly care of the Infant destined to open the way into the presence of God for all who believe in Him.

A responsible husband

Concern for the welfare of his family is further exemplified in the second chapter of Matthew, when Joseph is

again spoken to in a dream (vv.13-15). This time he was instructed to take Mary and Jesus into Egypt to escape the wrath of king Herod. By his observance of the angel's words he was demonstrating that he was the head of his house – and recognised by God as head, as all divine instructions were delivered to Joseph.

This is another lesson for those of us that have responsibility for families. Joseph might not have understood much about God's purposes for the Infant, nor does it seem he grasped the full significance of the shepherds' visit or the words spoken on various occasions that delineated the mission of Jesus. Despite this Joseph still manifested great diligence and vigilance for the safety and welfare of those entrusted to his care.

Nativity plays enacted by many schools at the end of the autumn term carelessly portray the visit of the wise men as taking place in a stable or cave. We know however, because Scripture tells us, that the presentation of gifts took place in a house (Matthew 2:11). Though many Bible commentators deduce from this that the visit happened some time after the birth, the sequence of events that first Christmas is not my first concern here. Rather do I wish to emphasise that the young family were living in a house. This again, I suggest, is emblematic of the overarching care exercised by Joseph towards Mary and her child, as he sought to provide them with suitable accommodation.

A godly husband

Another feature of Joseph as a father was his concern to establish Jesus in the godly tradition of his people. We read about this in Luke 2:21-24. We must remember that Joseph knew the Child was not his when he took Him to Jerusalem along with Mary to fulfil the various requirements of the Law. This demonstrates his zeal for the ancient teachings that made the Israelites the people of God.

Comparing verse 24 with the instruction in Leviticus 12:8 affords us an insight into the material status of the young couple, in that all they could afford for a sacrificial offering was two pigeons. I think it can be safely assumed that despite their poverty, for as long as Joseph lived as head of the house, he directed its affairs with a single eye to the honour of the Lord, and that Jesus was brought up in a household where God and the holy Scriptures were revered.

A man of faith

Simeon's prophecy, given in the temple at Jerusalem (Luke 2:25-35), must have further settled Joseph's mind to accept his divine commission. Amongst the words spoken about Jesus are ones stating that he would be "a light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of [God's] people Israel" (v.32). The result of Simeon's comments was that Joseph and Mary " marvelled at those things spoken of [Jesus]" (v.33). Why is this phrase important in these thoughts about Joseph? I suggest that, on occasions during the years of the boyhood of Jesus on which



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Scripture is mainly silent, Joseph would have been the butt of cynical remarks about the mystery surrounding His birth. For instance, there is an interesting discussion in the eighth chapter of John's Gospel regarding Abraham being the father of the nation. In it the Jews who were arguing with the Lord said, "We are not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God" (v.41). One meaning that could be deduced from this is that they were accusing Jesus of being illegitimate, and referring to His birth in a nasty and derogatory way. Even if that were not the case here, Joseph would have often turned to the words of the angel, of Simeon, and of Anna too, spoken at Jerusalem when Jesus was a baby. Joseph would have needed faith in God's promises to cope with any taunts breathed against him and his family.

A caring "father"

One last point about Joseph can be traced from Mark 6:2,3, where Jesus is described as "the carpenter." Without a doubt, it must have been Joseph who taught him the secrets of the trade, and so this is further evidence of the care and affection that Joseph devoted to Jesus. Perhaps it is significant that here Jesus is not described as the carpenter's son, but simply as the carpenter, perhaps suggesting that Joseph was now dead. This could be the reason why we read nothing further about Joseph in the later chapters of the Gospels.

An example to fathers

In all of the foregoing, Joseph is an example to us all, *but especially those of us who are fathers*. His obedience to the heavenly commands even when he did not always understand them is an attitude that all who love the Lord should copy, along with his willingness to accept his responsibilities as head of the house. A love for the Scriptures seemed to permeate the home at Nazareth, where Jesus advanced in wisdom and stature as He grew in favour with both God and man (Luke 2:52). It was the little-known Joseph, the husband of Mary, who provided that home.

Apples of gold in pictures of silver

The importance of words

Jim Wolf

Our words can do immense harm. How much we all need the prayer, "Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth" (Psalm 141:3, NKJV). But they can also do great good. This heart-warming study shows us how.

Words fitly spoken

My computer home page has been set to include a daily Bible verse. One day not long ago I opened up to find, "As apples of gold in pictures of silver is a word spoken in season" (Proverbs 25:11, Darby Trans.). This phrase kept popping into my mind, and I remembered hearing it some sixty years ago in a particularly apt word at a fellowship meeting. Just look for a moment at the sheer beauty of the picture it paints in our minds. Some translations render the word "picture" as "basket" (see Darby Trans., margin). The craftsmen of that era were highly skilled in what is known as filigree work, so that when the golden apples were placed in this beautiful basket the gold could be seen – indeed it would shine through. A princely gift, no doubt! This very handsome figure of speech makes the proverb leap off the page: and it is applied to "a word spoken in season."

How often have we said something and instantly wished we could swallow it! It may have been said in anger, or simply unthinkingly and in haste. Then we hear the well-intentioned, "Well it needed to be said." This usually indicates that the word spoken showed little care for the hurt it caused. School bullies will often say, "I never touched him/her. I only *said*." Careless, unthinking words have been the cause of family rows, feuds, even wars. How different to the picture we have painted for us by the proverb!

The abundance of our hearts

Let us explore this further in Matthew 12:34-37. Remember the golden apples shining through the delicate filigree work of the basket!

The Lord Jesus is here answering the accusation of the scribes and Pharisees that He cast out demons by satanic power. He asks them, "How can ye speak good things, being wicked?"

There was a long running court case in Scotland concerning a man who had a high place in public office and who was accused of lying. We could be forgiven for shrugging the shoulders and saying, "He is a politician, he lies!"

But it also concerns the moral conduct of the office by the man entrusted with it. The question posed by the Lord is analogous to this: “How can you, being wicked, speak good things?”

The Lord goes on to touch the root of the matter, saying, in effect, “It is out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good man has good treasures and speaks of good things, but the wicked man has wicked treasures and speaks of wickedness.” The unfitness of their words evidenced the unfitness of their hearts. Yet it is sobering to find the Lord ending this section with, “By thy *words* thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.” This is true in everyday life. I cannot see the thoughts of a person’s heart – and thankfully they cannot see mine! We do, however, hear the words that others speak, and see each other’s actions, and from these may draw conclusions about the thoughts and intents of their hearts. The Lord was speaking to those who claimed superiority in things concerned with the Scriptures, but He, the One “who knew what was in man” (John 2:25), not only heard their words but could unerringly judge the thoughts behind the words – that they were wicked. Others cannot judge us unerringly. Christians should therefore beware of taking the “moral high ground,” and yet letting our words bring dishonour to the Lord. Of course *we* can never be condemned (Romans 8:1, 34), but the words we speak may well be condemned. Men look on the outward appearance, and what do they see? Do they “read” wickedness, or do they see what is the product of inner goodness shining through “like apples of gold in baskets of silver”? If we should at all achieve this, it will not be because of our own efforts to be good, but because of all the goodness that the Lord has won for us in full measure by His death and resurrection.

Obtaining fitly spoken words

But if our hearts are as we know them to be – in themselves no better than that Scots politician’s heart, or those scribes’ and Pharisees’ hearts – how in practice is His goodness going to act upon us, to equip us with “fitly spoken” words? We find some answer to this question in the prophecy of Isaiah 50:4-8. How often we quote the words from verses 6 and 7 in our meditations at the Lord’s supper! He did give His back to the smiters and He did have the hair plucked from His blessed cheeks. He did suffer shame and spitting, and it is right that we “think of all [His] sorrow, and thus remember [Him].” But how often have we considered verses 4 and 5 as well? “The Lord GOD hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a *word in season* to him that is weary” (v.4, KJV). Here

is a lesson readily available to us from the Lord's prophetically spoken words: "He wakeneth morning by morning. He wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned." Recollect that the manna too was gathered every morning (Exodus 16:21). This is very challenging, as we can only give out of our treasure store what we have first taken in. What is the source of our treasure? For some it is the world and the things that are in it. But the Lord GOD is the source of all worthwhile treasure for those who belong to Christ, as this prophecy says. How do we access this treasure? I am reminded of a hymn we often used to sing:

Take time to be holy, speak oft with thy Lord;
Abide in Him always, and feed on His Word...

Take time to be holy, the world rushes on;
Spend much time in secret, with Jesus alone.
By looking to Jesus, like Him thou shalt be;
Thy friends in thy conduct His likeness shall see.

Take time to be holy, let Him be thy Guide;
And run not before Him, whatever betide.
In joy or in sorrow, still follow the Lord,
And, looking to Jesus, still trust in His Word.

Take time to be holy, be calm in thy soul,
Each thought and each motive beneath His control.
Thus led by His Spirit to fountains of love,
Thou soon shalt be fitted for service above.¹

Gethsemane

Of course, Isaiah 50:4-8 applies primarily to the Lord in His sufferings. We often wonder how He could endure these things, especially what was finally witnessed to by His agonized cry from the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" But also His abandonment by His friends. Let us go back a little in time to the garden of Gethsemane. He asks the disciples to watch with Him and withdraws a little way. He himself retires into the presence of the Father and continues in prayer. He asks His Father if there be any other way.

Blessed, precious words for us, in that He declares, "Not my will but thine be done" (Luke 22:42). He has accepted all at the hands of the Father, and goes on strengthened to the cross and all that awaited him there.

¹ W.D. Longstaff, 1882.

What of the disciples? They were asleep.

But what of the disciples who were also with Him in the garden? Were they strengthened? They were *asleep*, and shortly after “they all forsook him and fled” (Mark 14:50). While the Lord acted perfectly calmly in the face of those who came to take him, Peter drew a sword and reacted angrily. The Lord met His abuse by the Sanhedrin with silence, except for confession of His Name; Peter denied his Lord with oaths and curses. The lesson for us out of this contrast is the wonderful value of close communion. The Lord took every opportunity for prayer, and perhaps we can connect with this His words, “For I have not spoken from myself, but the Father who sent me has himself given me commandment what I should say and what I should speak; and I know that his commandment is life eternal. What therefore I speak, as my Father has said to me, so I speak” (John 12:49, 50, Darby Trans.). Perhaps we may say that these “commandments” were not received in glory before the Lord came into this world, but were obtained daily from the Father in close communion. “He wakeneth morning by morning; he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the instructed.” I have to admit to falling very far short of this.

We leap forward and see Him on the cross when He spoke a “word in season” to one who acknowledged his own wickedness, but the purity of the Lord. “To-day thou shalt be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43). These treasured words shine into our hearts as “apples of gold in baskets of silver.”

Can we apply these things to ourselves? I believe with God’s help we can, by listening to His voice. By applying ourselves to the Scriptures we can in some small way let our light shine like those golden apples peeping through the filigree-work of silver. In Ecclesiastes 12:10 we find the words, “The preacher sought to find out acceptable words, and that which was written was upright, even words of truth.”

The lesson for us is the value of close communion.

“By the word of the Lord”

Theo Balderston

This article continues the defence of the Biblical doctrine of the rapture that commenced in the January issue.

“¹⁵For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. ¹⁶For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.” (1 Thessalonians 4:15-16, NKJV)

These verses, together with verse 17, constitute the central text in the doctrine of the “rapture” or “snatching up” of believers by the Lord when He comes for them. Many modern Christians prefer to regard them as a poetic description of some ineffable event, and dismiss as naïve a factual understanding of them. But, as we will see, the text demands a simple, factual understanding of itself. Even more Christians merge what these verses describe into the single event of the Lord’s coming to the world in public, terrifying glory. But the previous verse – verse 14 – says that as Jesus died and rose again, *even so* God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep – i.e., they too have *died*, and so God will bring them, too, as *risen* saints.¹ This was how Paul reassured the grieving Thessalonians. However

the resurrected saints will be accompanied by transformed saints who never died, because 3:13 says that Jesus will come “with *all* his saints.” All this was argued in a previous article.² Therefore, what the verses at the head of this article begin to describe is what must happen first, in order for those resurrected and transformed saints to return with Christ in glory from heaven.

One reason why many interpreters regard this passage as a description of a stage in the Lord’s return in public majesty is the word for “coming” in v.15. This is *parousia*, and the relevant definition of it in one leading lexicon is, “Coming of Christ, and nearly always of His Messianic Advent in glory to judge the world at the end of this age.” However it turns out that virtually the only occurrences of this word from

¹ The NIV [1978] much dilutes the force of the “even so,” but the ESV and NRSV retain it.

² “With all His saints”, in the January issue.

which to form its definition when it relates to the Lord’s return are the actual seventeen places in the NT where it is used to refer to that Coming.³ There are next to no occurrences outside the NT that can shed light on this matter. These seventeen certainly include texts with judgmental overtones, but the majority of them do not. When we take these occurrences together with the six places in the NT where it bears a purely mundane meaning,⁴ and the one where it denotes the coming of antichrist,⁵ we conclude that the word can bear varied nuances, and must take its colour from its context. The above definition assumes what the word means and reads it into all its occurrences. Without this assumption the word can denote both the Lord’s coming *for*, and *with*, His saints.

Which word from the Lord?

Paul commenced verse 15 by stating that what he is about to write is a “word of the Lord.” Many interpreters assume that he must mean something the Lord said in the days of His flesh. The most obvious such

word recorded in Scripture is Matthew 24:30-31,

“³⁰Then the sign of the Son of man will appear in heaven: and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. ³¹And he will send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”

Mark 13:26-27 reads essentially similarly. But these two texts must in turn be understood against their clear OT antecedents:

“Then the LORD will scatter you among all peoples, from the one end of the earth to the other...” (Deuteronomy 28:64).

“Now it shall come to pass, when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you... and you return to the LORD your God and obey his voice according to all that I command you today, you and your children, with all your heart and with all your soul, that

³ Namely, Matthew 24:3, 27, 37, 30; 1 Corinthians 15:23; 1 Thessalonians 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; 2 Thessalonians 2:1, 8, 9; James 5:7, 8; 2 Peter 1:16; 3:4, 12; 1 John 2:28. It is attested as signifying a state visit by a monarch to a province or city, something that scholars have made much of, but overlooking that such visits were peaceable in intent, and hence contradictory to the lexicon’s definition of it as signifying the Lord’s coming in *judgment*.

⁴ 1 Corinthians 16:17; 2 Corinthians 7:6, 7; 10:10; Philippians 1:26; 2:12.

⁵ 2 Thessalonians 2:9.

the LORD your God will bring you back from captivity, and have compassion on you... If any of you are driven out to the farthest parts under heaven, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there he will bring you....” (Deuteronomy 30:1-6).

“Remember, I pray, the word that you commanded your servant Moses, saying, ‘If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations. But if you return unto me..., though some of you were cast out to the farthest part of the heavens, yet will I gather them from there and bring them to the place which I have chosen as a dwelling for my name’” (Nehemiah 1:8-10).

“So it shall be in that day, that the great trumpet will be blown. They will come who are about to perish in the land of Assyria, and they who are outcasts in the land of Egypt, and shall worship the LORD in the holy mount at Jerusalem” (Isaiah 27:13).

“...Oh LORD, save your people, the remnant of Israel.’ Behold, I will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the ends of the earth...” (Jeremiah 31:7-8).

“Up, up! Flee from the land of the north, says the LORD, for I have spread you abroad like the four winds of heaven,’ says the LORD.” (Zechariah 2:6).

The verses in Deuteronomy say that Israel will firstly be scattered on account of her infidelity to the Sinaitic covenant, then, eventually, when penitent and faithful in heart to the covenant, be regathered (30:1-6). Nehemiah appealed to this Scripture, but its fulfilment in the return from Babylon had been only partial, as he recognised in his penitential prayer (9:31-37). Ezra’s similar prayer confessed that even after the return the Jews could not claim to be keeping the covenant (9:8-15). Deuteronomy 30:6 had made clear that only when *the LORD* circumcises the hearts of Israel can the covenant be kept – implying that they were of themselves incapable of the heart-faithfulness demanded in Deuteronomy 10:16. Only then would Israel at last be re-gathered to the land. This is plainly the occasion contemplated in Matthew 24:31 || Mark 13:27, and there can be no doubt that the disciples would so understand the Lord when they heard Him speak these words. The Deuteronomic texts do not contemplate resurrection, nor did Nehemiah’s appeal to them. The reference to the ends / uttermost part of heaven is part of the Deuteronomic template. Nor does “elect” carry the reference beyond Israel; this too is very Deuteronomic (Deuteronomy 4:37; 7:6-7; 14:2) – and also Isaianic in relation to the remnant of Israel (65:9, 15, 22). For

*The phrase “by the word of the Lord”
denotes a special
and immediate communication.*

the great trumpet and the four winds, see the third-last and last quotations.

Thus in Matthew 24:31 || Mark 13:27 the Lord foretells a gathering of an elect remnant of living Israelites, without reference to their being joined by any dead and resurrected believers, let alone their being raptured into the air. So this cannot be the “word of the Lord” which Paul communicated in 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17. Rather the phrase “by the word of the Lord” replicates the Greek of 1 Kings 20:35, where it clearly denotes a special and immediate prophetic communication.⁶ Paul is writing as a Christian “prophet” (cp. Romans 16:26; Ephesians 2:20) about a direct communication from the ascended Lord, and he seems deliberately to differentiate it from Matthew 24:31 || Mark 13:27 by emphasising that “the Lord Himself” will descend from heaven to meet His believing people; He will not simply “send forth His angels.”

Why the dead in Christ first?

Verse 15 says that the living will not in any way precede (or, “have an advantage over”) them that are fallen asleep. Verses 16 and 17 show how this will be very simply achieved. “The dead in Christ will rise first” (v.16) and the living will have to wait till this has happened so that all can be raptured *together*. This is very matter-of-fact; Paul writes as if he really thought it was going to happen! It is far too matter-of-fact for many scholarly commentators, who are too pre-occupied with searching for apocalyptic and other metaphorical imagery to notice the simple matter-of-factness of Paul’s account. He wasn’t depicting the ineffable (in some commentators’ arguments, bordering on the unreal) in poetic language. For Paul, resurrection is quite matter-of-fact, as 1 Corinthians 15 abundantly teaches, because it means real bodies being really raised. This is so, even if the glory of the resurrection body does beggar the imagination (1 Corinthians

⁶ The Greek of 1 Kings 13:17, 18 is similar, though not exactly the same.

*Paul writes as if he really thought
it was going to happen! For Paul, resurrection
is quite matter-of-fact, as 1 Corinthians 15.*

15:42-44; Philippians 3:21). Therefore Paul’s language and argument must convey this factuality. Modern Christians, reacting against what they see as the crude literalism of former generations, and in favour of what might be called the “Narnia-isation” of Christianity, fail to see that it was by facts, not poetry, that Paul sought to cheer up the grieving Thessalonians.

Echoes of Sinai?

Verse 16 says that the Lord will descend “with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God.” Many commentators wish to find echoes of Exodus 19:16-19 in this description, but seem to ignore the fact that in Exodus the thunder, lightning and trumpet were designed to terrify the people of God, who were strictly prohibited from going on the mountain to meet the LORD (Exodus 19:12,13, 21-24); whereas in 1 Thessalonians 4:15ff Paul clearly wished to encourage his readers with the thought of a joyful meeting with the Lord. Only if Paul intended a parallel between the raptured saints and Moses alone, who did go

up the mountain, could this passage involve allusion to Exodus 19. But there is no evidence here or elsewhere of Paul intending such a parallel. Quite the contrary: how inconsistent it would have been for *Paul* to ask his readers to understand their rapture through the prism of Moses going up the mountain to receive the *Law*, by which no flesh will be justified! (Galatians 2:16)

The shout

The word in verse 16 for “shout” does not emphasise loudness but authoritativeness; it is a derivate of the verb “to command.” It was used for commands in hunting and rowing as well as battle – hardly thunderous. There was a trumpet at Sinai, and there will be a trumpet at the ingathering of Israel (Isaiah 27:13). And in 1 Corinthians 15:52 Paul writes of “the *last* trumpet:” does this “last” signify that the trumpet at the rapture must be the trumpet of Isaiah? We have not read far enough. In 1 Corinthians 15:54 Paul writes that “death is swallowed up in victory” at transformation of living saints (i.e., at the rapture) cit-

ing Isaiah 25:8 (which makes the swallowing up of death the precursor of the millennial feast of v.7⁷). Yet in Paul’s mind – in this very chapter – the final annihilation of death is not until “the end”, when the Lord hands back the kingdom to the Father (vv.24-26), i.e, till the end of the millennium. Just as there are two resurrections, so there are two stages in the conquest of death (see too Revelation 20:11-14). As the eminent 19th-century scholar Henry Alford wrote in reference to v.51, “The word *last* must obviously not be refined upon as some... have done, identifying it with the seventh trumpet of the Apocalypse; – nor pressed too closely as if there were necessarily no trump after it – but it is the trump at the time of the end, ‘the last trump’ in a wide and popular sense.”

So much for what the shout, the voice and the trump are *not*: what *are* they? One linguistically expert opinion is that “the shout”, “the voice of the archangel” and “the trump of God” are not three separate sounds, but that the last two stand in apposition to the first. But I am unwilling to believe that the text reduces the “shout” to an archangel’s voice coupled with a trumpet sound. Rather the opposite:

the Lord’s own “shout of command” has the character of an archangel’s voice, and of a trump of God. The Lord’s voice commands the dead bodies of deceased saints to rise, transforms the bodies of the living, and gathers both by rapturing both to Himself in the air. To interpret why the Lord should use an “archangel-voice” we should compare the only other reference to an archangel in Scripture – Jude 9, where its occurrence also concerns a *corpse* – Moses’s. Basing our interpretation of Scripture on Scripture, could this imply that the Lord’s shout has an “archangel” character because it is a corpse-raising command?

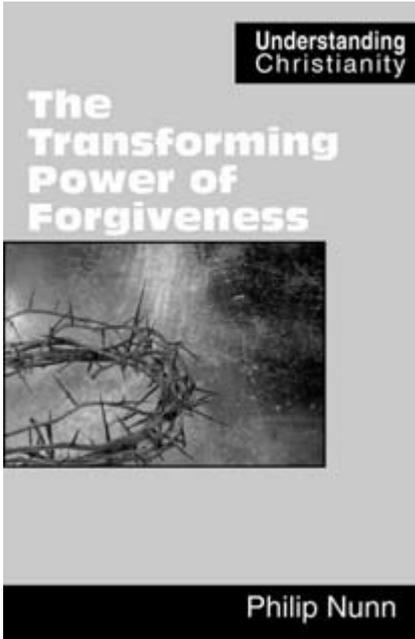
Similarly the Lord’s voice has an assembling effect: the just-resurrected dead and the living are raptured together. One major use of trumpets in the OT was to cause the people to assemble and move forwards (Numbers 10:3-7); as also of the trumpet of Isaiah 27:13. There may also be a figurative allusion in the trumpet to Leviticus 25:9,10, where the loud trumpet proclaimed liberty to the inhabitants: cp. Romans 8:21.

To be continued.

⁷ See J.A. Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah. An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, Ill., 1993), p.209.

The Transforming Power of Forgiveness

by Philip Nunn



Philip Nunn served the Lord as a missionary and Bible teacher for fifteen years in Colombia, South America. During this period he was regularly engaged with the important topic of forgiveness. While counselling men and women he observed lives being changed as they chose to obey the Lord Jesus and forgive. Now back in Europe, he continues to help Christians forgive those who have hurt them, and so remove the hindrances to their spiritual growth.

In this book, he explores forgiveness from a Biblical perspective. In doing so, he corrects a number of common misunderstandings that hinder authentic forgiveness. He wants his readers not only to receive God's great gift of forgiveness but also to forgive those who have sinned against them. He carefully leads his readers step by step away from the chains of bondage to experience the wonderful freedom which Christ has purchased for them. There is a transforming power in forgiveness!

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“This one thing I do”

Philippians 3:13-14

Morn, noon and night,
through days o’ercast and bright,
my purpose still is one:
I have one end in view,
one only thing I do
until my object’s won.

Behind my back I fling
as an unvalued thing
my former self and ways;
and, reaching forward far,
I seek the things that are
beyond time’s lagging days.

The day declineth fast;
almost its hours are past,
its lustre waneth now.
That other, heavenly day,
with its enduring ray,
shall soon light up my brow.

Oh! may I follow still,
faith’s pilgrimage fulfil
with steps both sure and fleet.
The longed-for goal I see —
Jesus waits there for me.
Haste, haste, my weary feet!

Anon. (19th century)