

Scripture Truth



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Growing with the gospel

The Importance of Ephesus
Weep with those that weep
The Revelation of Jesus Christ

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Editor: Theo Balderston

Editor's e-mail: editor@scripturetruth.org.uk

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SCRIPTURE TRUTH Publications

31-33 Glover Street, CREWE, Cheshire CW1 3LD

Tel: 01270 252274

Fax: 01477 587454

Crucifixion

Sometime in the third or fourth century a pagan man asked the oracle of Apollo how he could persuade his wife out of her Christian belief. The answer came, "Let her continue as she pleases, persisting in her vain delusions, and lamenting in song a god who died in delusions, who was condemned by judges whose verdict was just, and executed in the prime of life by the worst of deaths, a death bound with iron."¹

That "death" was crucifixion, and this "oracle" sums up the ancient pagan view of the cross of Christ. Crucifixion, when decreed by a Roman judge, was "the supreme penalty," and usually reserved for persons posing a threat to the state, or the worst criminals. Only the lowest classes, and particularly slaves, normally suffered crucifixion. It was called the "servile punishment." See Philippians 2:7,8. And it was often accompanied by cruelties designed to utterly degrade the victim. This led contemporaries not to pity, but to despise him. They would regard a sentence pronounced by a Roman judge as deserved. Crucifixion was generally considered too disgusting a subject for polite literature.

For Christians to worship a crucified man as Lord of all, and God the Son, was incomprehensible to unbelieving Gentiles – and Jews too, since a crucified man was divinely accursed (Deuteronomy 21:23). "The natural man does not receive the things of God" (1 Corinthians 2:14). Human hearts must be divinely awakened to the sinfulness of sin to accept that Christ must be *crucified* for us.

Only the preaching of the *cross* could probe the depths of human self-esteem and self-righteousness. And the cross testifies both to the world's rejection of the Lord Jesus and to the world's judgment (Acts 4:24-27; John 12:31-33), whereas death by stoning would have been a penalty outside Roman jurisdiction and of unclear significance to Gentiles. Therefore it is no accident that the first mention in Isaiah of the Servant who was "wounded for our transgressions" (Isaiah 53:5) is in 42:1-7, immediately after the chapter that introduces Cyrus, the Persian conqueror who restored the exiles to their land (41:1-4; cp. Ezra 1:1-3). The Saviour of the world had to die in an epoch when He suffered Gentile "justice" because the throne of David was cast down (Psalm 89:39) – and yet at the hands of His own people too (Acts 2:23); during "the times of the Gentiles" (Luke 21:24), yet at Jerusalem (Luke 13:33). Hence the link with Cyrus.

¹ M. Hengel, *Crucifixion* (London, 1977), p.4. Other information from the same source, which is, however, seriously defective on the atonement.

Growing with the gospel

Philippians 1:12-30

David Callicott

Paul's imprisonment assisted the spread of the gospel! And he told the Philippians this to strengthen their faith. Can we tell similar stories to encourage others and help them to grow with the gospel? This article originated in a conversational Bible reading in Manchester.

Paul wanted the Philippians to grow with the gospel. This is why in Philippians 1:12-18 he tells them something he wants *them* to know – namely, that what had happened to him in Rome had turned out “for the furtherance of the gospel” (v.12, NKJV). Their heart was in the gospel, and so knowing about its progress would be their greatest encouragement! Then in verses 19-26 he tells them something he knew about *himself* – that events in Rome would turn out for his deliverance, whether in life or death. Paul’s complete confidence in God for his own future despite his dire situation would wonderfully strengthen them. And yet he also tells them that their prayers were integral to his deliverance. Finally, in verses 27-30 his concern for them makes him want to know something about *them*: that they were “with one mind striving for the faith of the gospel.”

So this passage displays a two-way upbuilding process between Paul and the Philippians. And my aim in this article is that we should personalise it. There should be a similar interaction between believers today, so that we all grow with the gospel, having care for one another. We can build others up by telling them how our unpromising circumstances have worked for the gain of the gospel, by our clear confidence in God to whom we have committed our lives, and by showing that we need their prayers. We also build each other up by loving interest in each other’s progress in “the faith of the gospel.”

Now we shall consider each of these three sections in turn.

What Paul wanted them to know (vv.12-18)

Paul was in a bad situation when he wrote this letter. Most people, myself included, have had experiences at some time in their lives that cause them to say, “Why has this happened to me?” This chapter has become very personal to me. A few years ago I was quite ill. But when I returned to work from hospital, before I could get from the ground floor to my desk on the

*What happened to me turned out
“for the furtherance of the gospel.”*

first floor I had to speak of Christ three times to three people to whom I had never previously witnessed. What happened to me turned out “for the furtherance of the gospel.” We should all think about situations of struggle that we’ve been in, where what has come out of it has been something great for the Lord.

Paul knew in advance that he would testify before Caesar, because the Lord had told him (Acts 9:15; 23:11, and especially 27:24). Beyond this fact, he knew little or nothing. His plans at the time of writing the Letter to the Romans – of visiting Rome *en route* for Spain (Romans 15:24) – had been wiped out by his arrest in Jerusalem (Acts 21:33). When he did get to Rome, it was as a prisoner who had no control over what was happening to him. Reading between the lines, Paul was afraid that all this was demoralising his converts in Philippi. Yet things had turned out so much the more to the furtherance of the gospel than if he had been a free man! His situation had enabled him to proclaim Christ to the *whole* palace guard as well as to others (vv.12-13). Paul’s wording suggests that he had had no idea this was going to happen. We could imagine Satan rubbing his hands when Paul arrived in Rome in chains. “This man who has converted so many to Christ is locked away now, and nothing will happen.” But God turned it into its opposite.

True, the Philippians should have been expecting something like this. If Paul’s plans had not been derailed by his “run-in” with the slave girl’s masters when he first came to Philippi, the Philippian gaoler would not have been saved (Acts 16:16-34). But “we forget so soon.” And our views of what God will do often rest on what we think should happen, usually in the short-term. But God often has a longer term in view, and His real work often proceeds along lines quite unexpected to us. The communist conquest of China in 1949 forced the missionary societies out of that land, but, through much persecution and many martyrdoms, it all turned out greatly to “the furtherance of the gospel” there, and to the enormous encouragement of believers elsewhere!

However: it is not good enough just to allow the things to happen *to* us. Everybody has to know that “[our] chains are in Christ” (v.13). Paul and

Paul's words and Paul's life had to bear witness.

Silas sang praises in Philippi gaol. Both Paul's words and Paul's life had to bear witness to his guards in Rome. If we don't respond similarly to our difficulties, there will be no gain for the gospel, and we will have missed out on the opportunity allowed us. Indeed, in all circumstances, the way I behave and the things that go on in my life will either be an encouragement or a discouragement to fellow-believers. That's a sobering responsibility.

But weren't these gains for the gospel inside the gaol offset by Paul's inability to evangelise outside the prison walls? Not at all: for other believers were emboldened by Paul's example "to speak the word without fear" (v.14). Far from being deterred by Paul's imprisonment, the opposite happened. This could only have been the Lord empowering their hearts through Paul's example. Paul even feels encouraged that some were motivated to "preach Christ out of contention," due to "selfish ambition" (vv.15, 16). Did they feel that Paul's being muzzled gave them a chance to shine as evangelists, and make Paul even more despondent about his confinement? Astonishingly, Paul passes over their motives (whatever they were), as long as the true gospel was preached (contrast his reaction to "another gospel" in Galatians 1:6-9). And thereby his own motive in all this is apparent: "*Christ is preached, and in this I will rejoice.*"

And no matter where *we* are, whatever our situation and personal troubles, we too can always rejoice to learn of the gospel being "furthered." And our rejoicing in this will encourage others!

What Paul knew (vv.19-26)

"For I know that this will turn out to my salvation [or, 'deliverance']" (v.19). We never know exactly what's going to happen. A few verses further down Paul expresses the conviction that he would be released "for [the Philippians'] progress and joy of faith" (v. 25). However his conviction was less absolute than it might sound here, for in 2:17 he went on to write, "Yes and if I am being poured out as a drink offering..." The words, "drink offering," hint at his possible martyrdom. Although he had a conviction (no doubt correct in the event) that he would be released from prison, he still left things in God's hands. This reminds us of those three men whom Nebuchadnezzar was consigning to the fiery furnace, and who said, "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us... and he will deliver us from your

hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we... will not worship the gold image which you have set up” (Daniel 3:17-18). What Paul “knew” was that things would turn out for his deliverance, whether by release or martyrdom. In this spirit he had the “knowledge” to add, “For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (v.21). Paul really *knew* it: that the things that he went through would be “gain” even if they entailed death, for this meant being with the Lord every moment of eternity.

“For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain”

Nevertheless he felt that what would most benefit the Philippians would be his “remaining in the flesh” (v.24). “Being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith, that your rejoicing for me may be more abundant in Jesus Christ by my coming to you again” (vv.25-26). Whether he ever got back to Philippi or not is unknown. But the very news of his release would filter back to Philippi, leading to their “joy of faith.” Paul viewed everything from the perspective of the glory of Christ and the benefit to his converts. What an example!

But the Philippians were also playing their part in this - through prayer – “*your* prayer” (v.19). Paul counted on the prayers of that weak and insignificant group of believers for his deliverance. What a powerful reminder of the need for prayer and of the power of prayer! Prayer is working even when the outcome is quite different from the hopes of the people praying. And notice that the word is in the singular – “*your* prayer.” Paul was thinking especially of the joint prayer that arose from their prayer meetings. We remember how Peter’s release both astonished and encouraged the praying church in Jerusalem (Acts 12:5, 14-16). Prayer made in small, struggling prayer meetings, if genuine and endorsed by all present, is powerful.

At any point in time all of us face essentially the two outcomes that Paul faced: will we live for Christ, or will we die and get the gain of being with Christ? Any “living on in the flesh” (v.22) will be only temporary: but will

*Prayer made in small,
struggling prayer meetings is powerful.*

it be occupied in *living* for Christ? This means living so that “Christ will be magnified in [our] body...” (v. 20). Paul’s body had been beaten, shipwrecked, flogged, imprisoned; yet Christ was magnified in it. He never classed himself as being a large or impressive man; it was his motive, his attitude, the way he conducted the things in his life that were important. Those palace guards knew that he belonged to Christ, that he was living for Christ, but that for him death would be departing to be with Christ, and “very far better.”

And if Christ is going to be magnified in me, it will need “the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.” The “Spirit of Jesus Christ” gives me this *right* motive (unlike some of those preaching in Rome – v.15!!) through occupying me with Christ. It is only as we view what *Christ* has done that we can magnify Him. He gave His life for His bride and in faithfulness to His Father who sent Him. And Paul’s life was lived by and for “the Son of God who loved [him] and gave himself for [him]” (Galatians 2:20).

What Paul wanted to know about them (vv. 27-30)

But Paul also wanted the encouragement of knowing something about *them*. Encouragement is a two-way process! He wanted to know that their conduct was “worthy of the gospel of Christ.” Specifically, he means, “that... I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel” (v.27).

Encouragement is a two-way process!

Where God is at work, the devil is busy too. If we are striving for the faith of the gospel, there will be attacks. If the attacks come from outside, they are clear and obvious, and we should be able to deal with them. They may be scary at the time, but they should confirm us in our faith. The fact of the attack proves the perdition of the assailants, but is also proof of salvation to those attacked (v.28).

It’s the problems from *inside* that destroy the testimony. So how important to be together, “in one mind, one spirit,” and “striving” in furtherance of the faith of the gospel, and *worthy* of the gospel of Christ!

The lesson is, that as companies of believers we can never be satisfied with where we are. Paul was not primarily writing a corrective letter but one in response to a donation sent to him (2:25; 4:10). Yet he realised that there

*Attacks may be scary
but they should confirm us in our faith*

were things the Philippians still needed (1:24). Unless we're going forward in our souls, we're going backward. Perhaps 4:2 suggests that Paul had heard about a small cloud on the horizon. So he wants to be reassured that they are continuing in their previous manner, standing fast in one spirit.

And we should not overlook the fact that Paul wrote, "for *the faith* of the gospel" (v.27). The expression, "the faith," suggests the body of belief that comprises the gospel, as against teachings that compromise the gospel. The beginning of chapter 3 hints that Judaizers had reached Philippi and were trying to bring them back under the Law. So, in addition to meeting the attacks of pagans, they had to defend the essentials of the gospel against subversive teaching from within the Christian "fold" – and in a united way, standing firm in *one* spirit. So we too need to stand together for "the faith of the gospel" as well as the "furtherance" of the gospel.

Lovingly, Paul pointed out to them that they were engaged in the same conflict as himself (v.30). His struggle was not harder than theirs! "To you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for his sake, having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear is in me" (vv. 29,30). They were going to suffer. But, just as Paul's experiences had actually turned out "for the furtherance of the gospel," so any suffering of theirs had the potential to turn out for the furtherance of the gospel. *And so has ours.* To be permitted to join in the same conflict as the apostle Paul's in Philippi and Rome is no mean honour, and it can be our privilege too, albeit in a much weaker form. Let us not "duck out of" this, but pray "that in everything Christ will be magnified in [our bodies]..." (v. 20)!

This is what it means to "grow with the gospel."

*Unless we're going forward
in our souls, we're going backward*

The Revelation of Jesus Christ

A vision of Christ: Revelation 1:9-20

Donald Davison

Scripture Truth has not engaged much with the prophetic Scriptures for some years. This article opens up the symbolism of John's mysterious and majestic vision of Christ in glory in a way that conveys the surpassing greatness of His Person and judicial office.

In the January issue we outlined the introductory verses of Revelation (vv.1-8). It is a “prophecy” which comes from the Triune God Himself, and in particular from “Jesus Christ,” who “loves us, and has washed us from our sins in his blood” (v. 5, Darby Trans.), and whom every eye shall one day see (v.7). How serious, then, to neglect its contents!

In this article we focus on the first and primary vision of the book. It sets the tone for all that follows, in the sense that it displays the Lord in the character in which He acts in Revelation. The section we shall study (vv.9-20) concerns:

- Where John is, and what he hears.
- John's primary vision.
- The Person who speaks.
- The structure of John's book.

Where John is, and what he hears

The first thing we notice in verse 9 is that John's apostleship and authority are not mentioned. He speaks of himself simply as “your brother,” identifying himself with the whole Christian company to whom the book is addressed. John styles himself their “companion [or, ‘partaker with them’] in the tribulation [persecution], and in the kingdom [i.e., authority and rule], and patience [i.e., patient waiting] of Jesus Christ” (KJV). This self-description tells us two things: Firstly, that during the present time, which has now lasted approximately two thousand years, our Lord Himself is waiting patiently for the moment when He will descend into the air with a shout and take His waiting people home. Secondly, that we too are sharing with Him in His patient waiting for that moment.

John was exiled on the island of Patmos (which has been described as “small, dreary, and isolated in the Aegean sea”) on account of his faithful witness for “the word of God and testimony of Jesus Christ.” Satan must have been pleased with himself at isolating God's servant in this way. But Satan always plays into

the hands of God so as to accomplish His will and design. John's exile resulted in the brightest and greatest prophetic revelation of our Lord Jesus and future events ever given to man.

Verse 10. It was "*the Lord's day*," and John was given a unique experience of being "in the Spirit" on that day. Few doubt that this was "the first day of the week," the great resurrection day (John 20:1), and the day on which Christians were accustomed to "show forth *the Lord's death*" at "*the Lord's supper*." Probably isolated and unable to partake literally, yet on that day John's sense of the privilege of fellowship at "*the Lord's table*," the rallying point of the whole circle of those who confessed Christ and refused idolatry and its Satanic undertones, would be especially strong (1 Corinthians 10:21; 11:20, 26).

And on this evocative day, John hears behind him "a great voice, as of a trumpet."

Verse 11. What is the voice saying? The best authorities omit the words with which the KJV starts the verse ("I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last"). John is told by the voice to write what he sees in a book, and to send it to the seven churches in Asia, specifying their well-known names, from Ephesus to Laodicea. But John also will hear much about "things which shall be hereafter" (v.19), and the report of these also has to be sent to the churches.

John's primary vision

Verse 12. John turns, and he sees first of all seven golden lamps (or, lampstands). Lamps are light-sources replenished from a reservoir of oil, and here they represent witnesses that depend on the Holy Spirit. We are reminded of the golden lampstand in the tabernacle with its seven lamps (cp. Exodus 25:37; Leviticus 24:2). Verse 20 tells us that each of these seven lamps represents one of the seven assemblies that are about to be addressed. "Seven" has the symbolic meaning of what is morally complete; and "gold" speaks of divine righteousness. Thus the figure symbolises what the assembly was like at its beginning, rather than what it would become in the history of the seven assemblies as traced out in chapters 2 & 3.

The Person who speaks

At the same time John sees a vision of the Lord in the midst of the golden lamps. As being in the "midst" of the seven assemblies, He is taking account with searching eyes of the conditions within each of them.

Verses 13-15. The Lord is portrayed as "one like unto {the} Son of man." In Daniel 7:13-14 the same words are used to describe One who approaches the

“Ancient of days” (cp. v.9) to receive everlasting dominion and glory. Here, in Revelation 1, the Lord is seen invested with the features of both the “Ancient of days” and “the Son of man.” “Son of man” is the Lord Jesus’ title of universal dominion over all the works of God’s hands (Psalm 8:6), and occurs many times in both the Old and New Testaments (though its usage in reference to the Lord must be distinguished from that in reference to men, e.g. in Psalm 146:3). It expresses the manhood He was prepared to take when coming into this world, which He still bears in glory, and by which He will administer universal rule and dominion over this earth for a thousand years. For in John 5:27 the Lord says that He is given “authority to execute judgement also, because He is the Son of man.” This is the widest title given to Him as set over all the works of God’s hands (Psalm 8:3-9; Matthew 24:27-31; John 5:27-29; Hebrews 2:6-9; etc.). It is a huge subject and worthy of earnest investigation and study.

The details of the Lord’s appearance all have significance. The “garment down to the foot” reminds us of the high priest’s robe of Exodus 28:31, 33 (the similarity is closer in the Greek translation of v.31). The priest was one who had to exercise discriminating judgement and distinguish between clean (i.e., holy) and unclean. The girdled breast denotes restrained affections, because the Lord was about to pronounce discriminating judgement against all that He saw as not in accordance with His mind and will among the assemblies. “His head and hairs white like wool, as white as snow” express maturity, wisdom, purity. They tell of venerable age associated with perfect understanding. “His eyes as a flame of fire” are piercing, burning, judging; making an accurate, invasive inspection which nothing escapes. “His feet like fine brass as if they burned in a furnace” were ready to tread upon all that is foreign to His nature, with bright but crushing judicial strength. “His voice as the sound of many waters” echoes the description of Jehovah’s voice in Ezekiel 43:2, and symbolises the Lord’s voice of majestic grandeur, in complete contrast to the voice of grace and love heard today by you and me.

Verse 16. “Out of His mouth went a sharp two edged sword” – setting forth the word of God that detects all that is contrary to Him. The Lord uses this word today (see Revelation 2:16) against all that dishonours His name and is contrary to Him. Do we not all know that, in taking up the Scriptures, their penetrating force is felt firstly in our own hearts and consciences before we

*His countenance was
as the sun shineth in his strength.*

All of these features represent the glory of God that radiates in judicial majesty from the face of Jesus Christ.

apply them to others? “His countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.” There are times even in these temperate climes when we are glad to get out of the sun’s burning rays. The figure speaks of searing, scorching exposure that leaves nowhere to hide from its penetrating light and judicial heat.

All of these features and more – representing the glory of God that radiates in judicial majesty from the face of Jesus Christ – are in manifestation in the prophecies of this book. In our own case we already know that “our God is a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:29) – consuming the dross in our lives, but not ourselves. This has a great voice for us to seek at all times to do, say, and in all things conduct ourselves, in ways pleasing to Him. However in the future days of judgment, when the Lord will reign supreme as Son of man, both the actions and the persons of all that are against Him will come under His scrutiny and consuming judgement.

Verse 17. After so graphic a view of our Lord Jesus, we are not surprised that John falls “at His feet as dead.” If we think of the contrast between this vision and John’s recollection of the Lord in His earthly pathway of meekness and humility, and even of His resurrection glory, we can readily understand the effect of seeing Him so arrayed in His priestly and judicial glory. However the Lord lays His “right hand” upon him. The “right hand” is the expression of ultimate approval, authority, power and administration. Our Lord is described in resurrection as sitting at God’s right hand, that is, on the throne of supreme authority and power (see Psalm 110:1; Hebrews 1:3, and over twenty places in the New Testament). And so in this verse the One invested with supreme judicial power speaks directly to John, and says, “Fear not.” What words of comfort and encouragement to His isolated and faithful servant! This little phrase, “Fear not,” is heard some twenty times from the lips of the Lord in his manhood; and now in His risen glory they are spoken afresh as comfort and encouragement to His servant John – and by extension to us also.

“I am the first and the last.” This is a divine title expressive of the eternal Self-existence of God. It is spoken by Jehovah three times of Himself, in Isaiah 41:4; 44:6 and 48:12, and three times of the Lord in Revelation (1:17; 2:8; 22:13).

*Death holds the bodies,
and hades the souls, of the departed.
Possession of “the keys”
indicates the Lord’s power over both.*

Thus, in referring to Himself by this divine title the Lord proves exclusively His eternal and essential Deity as one in Godhead with the Father and the Holy Spirit. As “the First” there is none before Him, and as “the Last” none after. He is “before all things and by Him all things subsist [remain in being]” (Colossians 1:17).

Verse 18. “I am the living one.” There are many religions in the world but their leaders are either dead or dying. None of them are saviours in any sense. Our Saviour is alive for evermore in resurrection on the other side of death. This is what makes Christianity distinct from, and superior to, all other forms of religion. And He is the only one who could both *say* and *substantiate* concerning His life, that “I have power to lay it down and I have power to take it again” (John 10:18). And so He adds here, “I was [or, ‘became’] dead.” In order to die, the Lord had to become man, and in order to be the perfect sacrifice for sin He had to be sinless. He had to be one on whom death had no claim (see Romans 6:23), and yet be able to die. Therefore what we call “the virgin birth” was an absolute necessity for beginning the dismantling of Satan’s kingdom, whilst the resurrection of our Lord formed the conclusive proof of Satan’s ultimate and complete overthrow. No wonder that Satan tries with might and main to refute the truths of the virgin birth and resurrection! These two events signal the ultimate defeat, not only of Satan’s kingdom, but also of Satan himself and all his angels. Praise the Lord!

“I am living to the ages of ages...” (Darby Trans.) Death is defeated, and the eternal life that ever existed in the Lord from eternity is now established in resurrection and guaranteed for His own throughout eternity. The guarantee lies in the phrase, “... and have the keys of death and of hades.” (This is the correct Scriptural order, rather than “hell and death” as in the KJV.) Death holds the bodies, and hades the souls, of the departed. Possession of “the keys of death and hades” indicates the Lord’s power and authority over both. It guarantees that all will rise again – whether believing or unbelieving (though at vastly different times); a guarantee that is wonderful for us, but sad beyond description for the unbelieving.

The structure of John's book

Verse 19 is vital to the structure of the whole book. *The Revelation remains a mystery unless this verse is understood.* It is the one verse which tells us how the book is divided up, namely, into three sections. John is told to write about:

- Firstly, “the things which thou hast seen” (KJV). This refers to the vision he has just seen in verses 11-18 of this first chapter.
- Secondly, “the things which are.” This refers to the conditions of the seven churches described in the letters of chapters 2 & 3.
- Thirdly, “the things which shall be after these things.” This refers to the entire contents of the rest of the book from 4:1 to 22:5.

22:6-21 form a supplement to the whole book and give encouragement to the saints of all ages, with the added warnings of God's last words to unbelievers.

Keeping this structure in mind is indispensable to reading and meditating on the book. What in particular must be clearly understood is that from 4:1 the saints today are seen in heaven, and not seen any more upon earth until coming in association with our Lord Jesus when He comes to establish His kingdom and millennial reign. This clears a lot of difficulties when reading the major part of the book, and gives cause for much thanksgiving that we, the assembly, are viewed as being in heaven in the presence of the Lord during the time of the great tribulation, as a result of being raptured to glory (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). This is symbolically indicated in John's being called up to heaven in Revelation 4:1.

Verse 20 explains the mystery of the seven stars and the seven golden lamps, which were first seen in the Lord's hand in verse 16. The stars are often considered to indicate the morally responsible element in the seven assemblies, whilst the lamps are the seven assemblies themselves. We hope to consider in outline the “letters” which the Lord sent to these seven assemblies in further articles if the Lord permits.

After considering the greatness and glory of our Lord Jesus as portrayed in this chapter, well it will be if “in Spirit” we too fall at His feet in praise, worship and adoration, saying, “Even so come Lord Jesus” (22:20).

*The Revelation remains a mystery
unless Verse 19 is understood.*

When I am weak...

David Hughes

A searching article on the dangers of self-reliance, yet also of burying the “talents” God has given us for use in His service.

“When I am weak, then I am strong.” Paul’s words in 2 Corinthians 12:10 are well known. Many of us can quote them and know well the accompanying story. God had given Paul a “thorn in the flesh” in order to prevent him being “exalted above measure” (v.7, NKJV). Paul had been given special revelations, and there was an obvious danger that he would become proud in this knowledge.

We don’t know what Paul’s “thorn in the flesh” was. We do know that he would have preferred not to have it. After all, he prays that the Lord would remove it. To this prayer he gets the precious reply, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness” (v.9). God had given Paul this “thorn in the flesh” to remind him to rely solely on God’s grace and not on the wonder of the revelations given to him or indeed his vast intellect. That’s a useful reminder, isn’t it? We need to rely on God’s grace as we serve Him.

But it has struck me recently that I have misunderstood what it means to be “weak.” What does God really mean when He talks about “weakness”? What does Paul mean when he says, “When I am weak”? I’ve been encouraged and challenged recently through reading of Peter fishing in John 21 and the Lord’s message in Revelation 2 to the church in Ephesus.

Perhaps we view weakness in terms solely of things that are visible. Perhaps your assembly is small and struggling? Perhaps we lack evangelistic gift? Maybe we lack capable teachers? Maybe we lack pastoral care? It’s probable that there is some truth in all of these, but does this mean that we are “weak”? Well, in a visible sense, yes; but I don’t think this is what Paul, and the Lord, had in mind in 2 Corinthians 12. If we think we are weak in this sense, then what happens when we try to serve the Lord? We try some evangelistic effort almost with the approach, “Well Lord, you can see we’re weak. Look how few of us there are! We’re waiting for You to do something here!” Then no one is saved and nothing seems to happen. What’s gone wrong? Aren’t we “weak”? Doesn’t the Lord work when we are weak?

The problem is that we view weakness in the wrong way! When Paul speaks about being “weak,” he is not referring to a small assembly, or a lack of per-

sonal ability. He is speaking about a total lack of reliance upon himself and a total dependence on the Lord.

Consider John 21:1-14. It's a very familiar passage but worth reading again to remind ourselves of the situation. The Lord has been raised from the dead, but the disciples are left on their own. They don't know what to do, so, on Peter's initiative, they end up going fishing. Their night of fishing proves unfruitful. What a waste of time! What a visible sign of weakness and failure – empty nets! Then the Lord appears, and, upon hearing they had caught nothing, tells them to try fishing on the other side of the boat. The 153 fish in the net prove to Peter that it is the Lord on the shore, and he can't wait to be with Him. (Note the devotion! Are we so keen to be in the Lord's presence?)

Once on shore, Peter finds that the Lord is already cooking some fish and some bread. Yet the Lord asks Peter for some of the fish they had caught. Why is this? It surely wasn't as if the Lord was short of food in any way! He certainly would have had enough. There are at least two lessons we can learn from this event about weakness.

Peter and the other disciples were struggling. But it wasn't through lack of skill. At least some of them were seasoned fisherman, and they wouldn't have forgotten it all whilst they followed the Saviour for three years. They had all the necessary skills but they were still struggling. Yet when the Lord tells them to try the other side of the boat (v.6) they obey and are immediately rewarded. This tells us that weakness means a willingness to rely on the Lord and not on ourselves. It means a willingness to let go of all our expert knowledge and experience and trust what the Lord says – and to do it! How much attention do we pay to the simple commands found in the Bible? Are we obedient to them? Would we be willing to obey the Lord and stop relying on our own experience, wisdom and talents? If we are to be truly strong and useful in the Lord's service then we must! In summary, if

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a willingness to rely on the Lord
and not on ourselves*

we are to be weak in the sense that Paul refers to, we must trust the Lord rather than ourselves.

But then, as if to perfectly counterbalance this, the Lord asks Peter for some of the fish he had caught. As we've already noticed, the Lord didn't really need to do this. So why does He? I think that this is a great example of the balance found in the Scriptures. Although the Lord already had fish, He wanted to use some of the fish Peter had caught. Although He had orchestrated this miraculous catch, He wanted to use some of Peter's talents to help feed the disciples that morning. It wasn't as if the Lord needed Peter's fishing talent, but He wanted Peter to use the abilities God had given him for Him.

This teaches us that when we think about weakness we are not talking about a lack of ability, necessarily. We must not frown upon natural ability. God has given us talents and gifts. Some can speak most winningly of Christ. Some can talk to children so as to capture their attention. Some are able to express ideas clearly, some have practical minds, some can organise well. Some people have musical talent, some can build or mend, some can cook. When we talk about being weak, we are not talking about lacking these abilities. Sometimes we can so emphasise the need to rely on the Lord that we almost make out that the abilities He has given cannot be useful. Yet this is not so! God want us to use the abilities we have in His service. But He wants us to depend on Him, not our abilities.

Peter clearly was useful to the Lord. He could fish, and later he would preach to many people. Yet the Lord needed to teach Peter not to rely on his own talents, but on the Source of those talents – Himself. Similarly with Paul. He was a gifted man, with an intelligent brain, a disciplined life, and an ability to express complicated truth clearly. The Lord did not require Paul to abandon these characteristics when he served in the early church. Rather, Paul had to learn that he must depend on the grace of the Lord and not on his talents. Have we learned that? If we have ability, we must use it for the Lord. We shouldn't neglect and suppress the gifts God has given us for fear of becoming proud or relying on ourselves. Instead, we can pray that the Lord will keep us from thinking that our gifts, however important, will achieve anything except for the grace of God. God gives gift not so that we can impress others or increase our status, but so that He can be glorified and His sovereign purpose can be worked out. The second lesson, then, is that the Lord wants to use our gifts and talents in His work. Are we willing to let Him?

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Consider the Lord's letter (through John) to the church in Ephesus in Revelation 2:1-7. I find this a remarkable assembly. They had many things that could be praised. That's not surprising, considering all the things they were able to learn from Paul's ministry among them (Acts 19:10) and through Paul's letter to them. They had been told all about their spiritual blessings and how these truths should affect their lives. The Lord commends them for their labour. They were a hard-working assembly. They shunned evil and rejected imposters. They were known for their perseverance and patience. They tirelessly served the Lord in Ephesus. As far as outward appearances go, this was a fine assembly. Could my assembly be viewed in the same way? Let's seek before the Lord that our assemblies are so dedicated to the Lord's work! Yet the assembly was not strong. Rather it was weak! Why? Not because they had no gift, no understanding of the truth or were small in numbers. They had left their first love! In all their service they had stopped relying on the Lord's grace. Their affection for their Saviour had dimmed!

What a challenging indictment! It's easy, isn't it, to get so caught up with service for the Lord (whatever form that may take) that we lose sight of the Lord. We go on our own quest for godliness, trying by our own actions to be pleasing to God. Diligence is to be commended, yet not at the expense of reliance upon the Lord. Diligence alone will always ultimately fail, whether we are speaking of our personal quest to live lives worthy of our calling, or in our assembly lives. We only need to read Romans 7 to see that. The Ephesian church were commanded to "Remember therefore from where you have fallen" (Revelation 2:5). They were to remember the great truths they had learned and the supremely greater Saviour they had fallen in love with.

Have our hearts grown cold? Are we diligent in our private study of God's word but lacking in our conversation with the Lord in prayer? Are we active in assembly activity but lacking a reliance on the Lord's direction? The remedy is to meditate on the Lord! Spend time with Him. Think about His goodness to us, His greatness!

Then the Ephesians were to "repent and do the first works." This is a really interesting command. If we honestly examine ourselves and find we have drifted in our affections for the Lord and our reliance upon Him, then we must repent! We have a Saviour who is waiting to forgive us when we confess our sin. But they were commanded to do their first works. This stops us from feeling such a failure that we just give up and stop doing anything. It's interesting to consider that, if the Ephesian church had heeded this warning and repented, probably not a lot would be visibly different in the assembly. They would still be known for shunning evil, be energetic in evangelism, caring for the saints, teaching and preaching the Word faithfully. Yet what a real difference there would be! For now there would be no reliance on self, but instead a devotion to the Lord and a desire to see His church grow for God's glory.

What about us then? If we have drifted from our dependence upon Christ, and then repent, maybe not a lot will visibly change. It's possible, of course, that a lot will change and God will reveal new areas of service for us. But He may not. He may just want us to continue our previous works with a renewed dependence on and devotion to Him.

Earlier in 2 Corinthians, Paul is speaking of his (and our) responsibility to "diffuse the fragrance of [Christ's] knowledge in every place," and he asks "Who is sufficient for these things?" (2:14-16). We certainly are not in our own strength. Yet in the next chapter he gives the answer, "Our sufficiency is from God" (3:5,6).

May we not grow weary in using our gifts, talents, time, energy, money for the Lord and may we not grow cold in our affections for Him. But may we also seek to be weak in ourselves for then, "when I am weak, then I am strong".

When I am weak, then I am strong

The importance of Ephesus in the New Testament

Part 2: Letters to Ephesus from Paul and from the Lord

David Anderson

This article contains an enlightening analysis of the Letter that contains Paul's sublimest teaching and its implications for Christian living. Yet all this matters not a lot if we have "left [our] first love."

Introduction

In Part 1,* we reviewed the centrality of Ephesus to the *historical* development of Christianity as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. The letter Paul wrote to that great church is, correspondingly, of central *doctrinal* importance in the New Testament. It presents the highest and most blessed truths concerning Christ as Man, the relationship of Christians to Him, and the life that is demanded by this relationship. At a later date Ephesus even received a letter from the Lord Himself, but one which, sadly, pinpoints a turning-away of the early church from its pristine love towards Him (Revelation 2:1-7). The same church, but what sadly contrasting tones to the letters!

Ephesians and the exaltation of Christ

The teaching of Ephesians centres on Christ, the Beloved [Son] of the Father (see 1:6). However the Name of Son appears only once in the epistle (4:13), in contrast to the 44 occurrences of "Christ," which is its predominant name or title for the Lord. As Man, He is God's chosen and *anointed* (Greek, *christos*) One. Equally notably, half of the occurrences of "Christ" are preceded by the definite article: "*the* Christ."¹ In fact, the phrase, "the Christ" is more frequently used in Ephesians than in any other New Testament book. When preceded by the article, "Christ" becomes more an official title than a personal Name. It tells us of the place God wills for His Son in Manhood. The great subject of the first chapter of Ephesians is that God the Father has made known to us the secret of His will concerning the supremacy of "the Christ," in whom He is going to head up all things in "the dispensation of the fulness of times," both in the

* See the October 2012 issue.

¹ 1:10, 12, 20; 2:5, 13; 3:1, 4, 8, 17, 19; 4:7, 13, 15, 20; 5:2, 5,14,23, 24, 25, 29; 6:5 (Darby Trans.).

heavens and upon the earth. Ephesians explains how the purposes and counsels of God achieve this, having exalted Him already “far above all rule and authority and power” (1:21, ESV). So it is that in “the Christ” at the present time, God’s power is already active towards *us* (1:19-20). All of our blessings are “in,” “with,” “through,” or “by” “the Christ.”²

Ephesians and our exalted association with Christ

Of these four prepositions, “with” is the one most prominent in this Letter’s teaching about the Christian’s relationship with the Lord. The truth that believers are associated “with Christ” is a theme that develops through Paul’s letters, starting with Galatians, through Romans, and into Colossians. It reaches its climax in Ephesians. Paul has a particular way of representing the closeness of this association. He prefixes a preposition meaning “with” to various verbs. We can represent this by including the word “together” in the translation.³ Paul states as a spiritual reality that we are crucified “*together* with Christ; buried *together* with Christ; made alive *together* with Christ; raised up *together* with Christ; and seated *together* with Christ.”

“I am crucified *with Christ*” (Galatians 2:20) is a fundamental truth of the gospel. It means that I myself am dead in God’s sight. Nothing either in me or about me merits God’s favour; nothing I have done, or can do even after conversion, contributes to my salvation. Salvation is by the free grace of God alone, shown in the overwhelming love of His Son, “who loved me and gave himself for me.” Then in Romans 6:4 Paul adds the fact that “we were *buried...with Him* by baptism into death” to show that our old life (the one we derived from Adam) has been put away out of God’s sight. The gospel gives believers freedom not only from the penalty of sin, but also from the power and the practice of sin: “...our old self was *crucified with Him*...so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin” (6:6; compare vv.14-23). Our association with Christ’s burial is “in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the

² At least one of these prepositions is used in each of the following verses: 1:3-7, 10-13; 2:5-7, 13, 18, 21; 3:9, 21; 4:15-16.

³ The English phrase “[verb] + together with” translates a single Greek verb formed by combining the prefix, *sun-* (from which comes the English prefix *syn-*) with the simpler form of the verb. For example, in Romans 6:6 and Galatians 2:20, “crucified together with” is *sustaurōō*, from the verb, *staurōō*, “to crucify,” plus “*sun-*.” (*Sustaurōō* is also employed in Matthew 27:44, Mark 15:3 and John 19:32, when the two criminals were actually crucified with the Lord). A literal translation would be “to co-crucify.”

Father, we too might walk in newness of life” (6:4). And we realise this in ourselves when we “consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus” (cp. 6:11).

Paul returns to this truth in Colossians 2:12, adding that “...you were also *raised with Him* through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.” God now sees believers as associated with their risen Head, having also made us *alive together with Christ* (2:13) who is seated at His right hand (3:1, 3-4). It is due to our association with Christ that we are able to live the Christian life. He is our all-sufficient Source and we are therefore complete in Him (2:9 & 19).

But it is in Ephesians that Paul captures all aspects of our association with Christ, when he presents the capstone of these “together-with” truths, namely, the truth about our exaltation with Christ in the heavenlies. “God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us *alive together with Christ* – by grace you have been saved – and *raised us up with Him and seated us with Him* in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:4-6). The meaning of these verses is illustrated by the experience of Mephibosheth, who was both in a dreadful *condition* – as good as dead, being a member of Saul’s overthrown dynasty – and in a far-off *position* in Lo Debar (2 Samuel 9). Yet he was brought near to the king, given a position at the king’s table, and entitled to eat there continually. Similarly, we have been exalted “together with the Christ” in His present unseen place of supremacy! And just as in the case of Mephibosheth, *our* blessings are not so much for our benefit as “that [God] might display in the coming ages the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:7, Darby Trans).

Ephesians reveals the mystery of the Christ

Of all of the New Testament books, Ephesians is the one that presents the highest truth about the church.⁴ It views the church in its totality, that is, in its completeness as composed of all true believers from Pentecost to the Rapture.⁵ The “mystery of the Christ” is the secret of its special relationship to Him and its place in the eternal purposes of God. By revelation God made known to Paul

⁴ However the most exalted truths about the Person of Christ are found in other epistles, e.g. Colossians and Hebrews.

⁵ 1 Corinthians 11-14 mainly presents truths about the local church, whilst Romans 12 focuses on truths for the global church.

Ephesians is all about God

(3:1-5) “that [the Gentiles] should be joint heirs, and a joint body, and joint partakers of his promise in Christ Jesus by the glad tidings” (3:6, Darby Trans.). The word translated “joint” in this verse is the same preposition as translated “together with” in the last section, only here prefixed to “heirs,” body,” and “partakers.” In this place it means that the Gentiles are heirs, etc., *together with* Jewish believers. The use of the same prefix in these two different relationships implies that the closeness of our association with Christ (see last section) makes Jew and Gentile completely one with each other also.

And in Ephesians the church is not only Christ’s Body, His complement (cp.1:23), but also His Bride, to be the object of His love for eternity (5:25-32). Indeed, this truth is a profound mystery! Paul’s ministry is about the immense value of the church to God – “He purchased it with the blood of His own” (Acts 20:28). The church is God’s masterpiece to display His manifold wisdom (Ephesians 3:10), but we must ever remember that “the Christ” is its Head “on whom the whole body depends” (4:15-16, NEB).

Ephesians is about God being God

Behind these wonderful truths, Ephesians is all about God, and about how and why He does what He wills. This point is captured in the phrase “according to...”⁶ Verses with this phrase show that all of God’s plans and actions are commensurate with His character and nature. For example, the “mystery of the Christ” is “according to the eternal purpose which [God] purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord” (3:11, KJV). The Godhead acts:

- From Himself. Everything originates with the Father.
- Within Himself (1:9). He does not need to go outside Himself. He is His own counsellor (cp. Romans 11:33-36).
- Of Himself. It is after “the counsel of His own will” (1:11).
- By Himself. The Son does all the Father’s works.
- Through Himself, in the power of the Spirit.
- To Himself. His objective is for His Christ to fill everything (1:23).
- For Himself, that is, for His own pleasure and in keeping with His nature, which is love (1:5, 9).

⁶ 1:5, 7, 9, 11, 19; 3: 7, 11, 16, 20; 4:7, 21, 24.

What a wonderful list! Yes, the perfect will of God was disposed to put perfect counsel to His perfect purpose.

Paul and his readers

Paul understood that he was writing about heavenly things. He wished the readers to be engaged with them. This caused him to pray for them as he was writing. First, he prayed for their continued spiritual enlightenment so that they would have a greater appreciation of the realities of Christian blessings (1:15-23). Secondly, he prayed for their ongoing spiritual strengthening so that they would be able to appreciate and apprehend with all saints the truth of the mystery of Christ and the church (3:14 –21).

God desires that we should be engaged with these truths also!

The Lord's letter to the church at Ephesus, Revelation 2:1-7

Later, the Lord Himself wrote directly to the church in Ephesus, but a sadder letter. He sent it *via* the apostle John (Revelation 2:1). As John looked over to Asia from the isle of Patmos, Ephesus would be the first city in his line of vision, with the remaining six arching round to the north and east. Similarly, and viewed prophetically, Ephesus represents the first, the virgin state of the church, replete with “the whole counsel of God” in both doctrine and practice. However, the all-seeing Judge raised the charge against them that they had abandoned their first, or prime, love (2:4). In this we have, then, a diagnosis of the church's first point of departure from true apostolic Christianity – a further all-important lesson that the New Testament teaches us through Ephesus! This downward trend continues, until Laodicea is reached and Christ is outside instead of in the midst of it (3:14-22). Prophetically speaking, the letter to Laodicea is the Lord's assessment of twentieth- and twenty-first-century Christendom.⁷

Practical Consequences

As said earlier, God wants us to be engaged with the high truth contained in the Letter to the Ephesians, and in a manner that obliges us to respond to this truth in all spheres of life: in church, in marriage, in family, in employment, and in the world. So Paul implores his readers at the outset of the practical section of his Letter, “I, therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called” (4:1, ESV). “The

⁷ See my article on Revelation 3:18, “Buy gold and be rich today!” in the July 2011 issue.

calling” is our high and heavenly calling as developed in the previous three chapters; and “in a manner worthy” means that our lifestyles must reflect, and be consistent with, this calling. Its meaning is fleshed out in some detail in chapters 4-6:⁸

- Our lives are to be different in character from those in the world around us (4:17-19; cp. 2:2-3). “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (2:10).
- We are to imitate God and to walk in love (5:1,2).
- In a world of moral and spiritual darkness, we are to live as children of light (5:8).
- We are to live circumspectly, that is, soberly and carefully (5:15).

Doing these things, we will be able to withstand in the evil day (6:11 & 13).

Finally, appreciation of Ephesian truths leads to worship. We were saved to the praise of the glory of His grace and to the praise of His glory (1:6, 12 & 14). Therefore, we worship the One who has blessed us. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places” (1:3). This verse encapsulates some themes of the epistle:

- a. The Person who blesses us is no less than the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- b. Our blessings are spiritual in character (contrast Israel’s material blessings,⁹ Deuteronomy 28:1-6).
- c. The spiritual place, or environment, of our blessings is “in the heavens”¹⁰ – not exactly heaven, but the “heavenly realms” (see 1:3, NIV).
- d. Our position before God is “in the Christ” (“accepted in the Beloved,” 1:6, KJV).

“To [the Father] be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen” (3:21, ESV).

⁸ See fuller explanations in my articles ‘Walking with Christ’, October 2007, and ‘Walk worthy of the Lord’, January 2008.

⁹ Israel’s material blessings illustrate our spiritual blessings. For example, Canaan would represent the heavens. The features of land and its fruits picture our blessings.

¹⁰ 1:20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12 (Darby Trans.).

Weep with those that weep

Yannick Ford

True sympathy is rare. This should not be an excuse for not working at it.

I remember getting into trouble in my mathematics lesson at school for apparently not listening. I had asked the teacher to explain something, and so he started, and then seemed to get cross with me! A few minutes later he came over to my desk and asked me whether I did not think it rude to ask someone for an explanation and then not pay attention. Of course, that is rude – but at the time, I really thought I *was* paying attention, and so I was pretty confused. Looking back now, I expect that I stopped giving eye contact, or that some other body language suggested I wasn't listening. That would have been pretty irritating for the teacher.

Why did he get upset? Since he was taking the trouble to explain something for my benefit, he was giving of himself to me. If I appeared not to be listening, it would make him feel as if I was placing no value on his explanation, and consequently placing no real value on him.

And if we are to be of any help to others, they need to know that we are genuinely concerned for them, that we do care for them and do not see their problem as merely an interesting challenge. “Challenge” is an appropriate word, because even as I write these words, I realise how little I live up to them, and how much I need to learn. As always, we turn to the Lord Jesus to see how He dealt with such situations perfectly, because He always “did all things well” (Mark 7:37, NKJV). The account of the death and resurrection of Lazarus in John’s Gospel, chapter 11, is a wonderful example of the Lord’s care.

The first 27 verses of John chapter 11 contain many clear indications that this story would have a happy ending:

- The Lord Jesus loved Lazarus and his sisters (v. 5), and they were confident of His love (verse 3).
- The Lord Jesus clearly stated that Lazarus would be raised (vv. 4, 11, 23, 25).
- The Lord’s love for the family is clearly seen in that He purposed to go to Judea to see them, even though it was a dangerous journey (vv. 7, 16).
- It would seem strange, at first reading of this chapter, that the Lord Jesus stayed two days longer at the place where He was when He first

*Why then did the Lord Jesus weep?
One might have thought
that He would tell them to cheer up.*

heard of Lazarus' illness (v. 6), but the rest of the passage makes it plain that the reason was for the glory of God and of the Lord Jesus (v. 4), in the raising of Lazarus from the dead.

Why then did the Lord Jesus weep? Verse 33 tells us that when He saw Mary weeping, and also the others with her weeping, He was deeply moved; and verse 35, the shortest verse in our English translation of the Bible, tells us that "Jesus wept." He had just told Martha that He was "the resurrection and the life," and He had told His disciples that He would raise Lazarus. One might have thought that He would be in a hurry to console Martha and Mary, and to tell them to cheer up and get ready for a celebration, because He was about to perform an utterly amazing miracle.

But instead we read that He was deeply moved, and that He wept.

This passage proves to us the truth of Hebrews 4:15, namely, that we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathise with us. On the contrary, He truly enters into our joys and our sorrows. We have already seen that the Scripture states that the Lord Jesus loved Mary, Martha and Lazarus, and, because He loved them, their sorrow became His sorrow. He saw the sadness that this death had caused, and He knew that death was a result of sin,¹ for which reason He had come into this world to redeem us. It encourages us to put into practice the exhortation of Hebrews 4:16, that is, to draw near to the throne of grace with confidence, when we know that the One who can help us truly cares about us. The apostle Peter tells us the same thing about our Father in 1 Peter 5:7 – He cares for us.

The account in Luke 24:13-35 of the Lord Jesus accompanying the two disciples on the way to Emmaus is another notable instance of His care. He did

¹ The death of Lazarus was not as a result of a specific sin of Lazarus, i.e. it was not a disciplinary judgment because of a certain sin that Lazarus had committed. John 11:4 states that the whole occasion was for the glory of God. However, we know that death came in as a result of sin, as is clearly stated in Romans 5:12.

not immediately reveal His identity and the truth of His resurrection, but instead drew out of them the reason for their sorrow. Evidently His sympathy was very attractive, and of course His opening of the Scriptures must have thrilled their spirits, because they urged Him to stay with them (v. 29); and they later confessed that their hearts had burned within them while He had opened up the Scriptures to them (v. 32). It's interesting to look back at our lives and consider whether we have ever met a stranger whose sympathy and interest in our affairs was so affecting that we were very keen to spend more time with them. Or, if I turn the question around to myself, have *I* ever shown such interest in someone else? For myself, I have to say sadly, no, but I have often experienced the love and kindness of the Lord Jesus in such a way; and no doubt many of the readers of this article will say the same. Often I have gone back to Him with a very similar problem, and yet each time that the answer comes, usually through a pertinent Scripture, my heart has rejoiced to see how the Saviour cares to answer specific anxieties.

No doubt this is why the Holy Spirit inspired the apostle Paul to write in Romans 12:15 that we should rejoice with those that rejoice, and that we should weep with those that weep. Both things can be fairly difficult to do, but they demonstrate a genuine and heartfelt interest in the other person. Those who are weeping will need sympathy before being offered a solution for their problem. It is tempting to want to fix something for someone else, whereas entering into their circumstances can be draining and difficult, in particular because it can take up a lot of time. Similarly, to rejoice in the successes of others can be hard if we are feeling disappointment or discouragement in our own circumstances, but if we have reason to thank the Lord for some great blessing, it can seem strangely lonely if there is no one to share our rejoicing. The opening verses of Paul's second letter to the

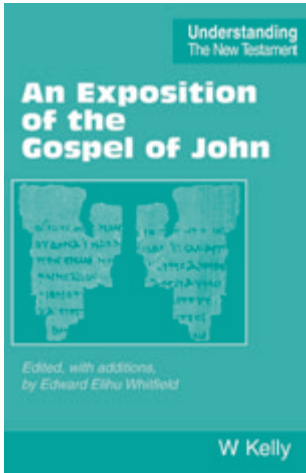
*This passage proves we have
a High Priest who can sympathise
with us. It encourages us
to draw near to the throne of grace.*

Corinthians give a valuable lesson – in verses 3-5 Paul shows how we can encourage or comfort others, having experienced the comfort of God ourselves first. That will be the best way to help someone, if we can point them to the Lord and to the Father, and explain how God has helped and strengthened us in a similar case.

The book of Job in the Old Testament is instructive in this area. Job's three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, initially wept with him as we can see in Job 2:12-13. Indeed, they sat with him seven days, which was very commendable indeed. Verse 11 tells us that they had made an appointment to go and see Job in order to show sympathy and comfort, and again this was very praiseworthy. Unfortunately, once they started speaking, the good effects of their visit dissipated! They criticised Job and implied that his suffering was due to some specific sin, and in so doing would have made it appear to Job that his friends' care for him as a person had evaporated. If we turn again to Luke 24, where the Lord spoke to the disciples on the road to Emmaus, it is true that He called them foolish, and slow of heart to believe what the prophets had spoken (see v. 25). However, He continued to speak of Himself, and interpreted the Scriptures to them – He did not continue to criticise them, as Job's friends did to Job. In the event, as we know, Job and his friends became angered with each other, whereas the disciples' testimony was that their hearts had burned within them.

Let us be encouraged therefore to “rejoice with those who rejoice, and to weep with those who weep,” so that others may feel the warmth of care, and so be brought into a situation where they can be encouraged by the Lord.

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A brand new edition of
**An Exposition of the
Gospel of John**

by William Kelly

edited, with additions, by Edward Elihu Whitfield

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William Kelly (1821-1906) was an outstanding scholar, preacher, teacher, magazine editor, editor of JN Darby's

"Collected Writings", and a prolific author. With a genius for exposition, he combined scholarly exegesis and analysis with devotional intensity. **Edward Elihu Whitfield**, editor of JN Darby's English version of the Old Testament, prepared Mr Kelly's Bible Treasury expositions of Mark and Luke for publication, adding a sequence of his own notes addressing, amongst other issues, critical views of those Gospels developed since the series of articles were written. Introducing Luke, the editor comments: "The notes are in general harmony with the expositor's point of view; much in them results from conversations and correspondence with him during a friendship of some thirty-five years." In 1908 he prepared a second edition of William Kelly's outstanding 1898 work "An Exposition of the Gospel of John" (which included Kelly's own translation from the original Greek) with a similar appendix of additional notes. Since many of the topics addressed in the notes relate to more than one Gospel, extensive reference was made in that edition to the additional notes on Mark. Sadly, the 1908 edition is marred by many typographical errors.

This new third edition has been prepared with particular emphasis on accuracy of text and Scripture references, sufficient detail to locate referenced critical commentaries (most of which are now freely available on the Internet), and the inclusion of appendices of notes on Mark and Luke to which the editor's notes refer. Indexes of Scripture references, Greek and Hebrew words, and subjects are separately provided for William Kelly's exposition and Edward Whitfield's additional notes.

John Rice

"Mr Kelly's careful expositions are outstandingly weighty in the true spiritual sense. Let any reader give careful attention to his Exposition of the Gospel of John and this point must be agreed. Here is profound and profitable exploration of Scripture, yet still leaving the awareness that there are exhaustless depths yet untapped. Such ministry gains rather than loses from its system and orderliness, which is no more nor less than that of Scripture itself. Here is real living contact with the Word of God" (Colin Curry, *Scripture Truth*, Volume 48).

The righteousness of God

“Christ Jesus, whom God has set forth to be a propitiation by his blood, through faith... to demonstrate at the present time his righteousness, that he might be just, and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.” *Romans 3:25, 26*

Quite often people say
they'd like to go to heaven:
if sins stand in the way
then sins will be forgiven.
But God is holy. (Let's be glad:
could we else trust the words He's said?)

None could to heaven go,
nor sinners there belong,
if all that this could show
were God condoning wrong.
But God has wrought amazing grace
through more amazing righteousness.

A new and living way
to heaven is opened wide
that the worst sinner may
go in; for Jesus died,
and God can say, "I, wrongs *condone?*
Look at the cross! And see *My Son*."

...And learn the meaning of 'atone.'
For you I judged My Only One,
for you He hung, condemned, alone.
And so it is My will that none
should enter heaven by other road
than faith in Christ's most precious blood."