

Scripture Truth



Inside:

Alone
No other gospel
“With all his saints”

Fishing, feeding, following
“Behold I come quickly...”
Elijah – the prophet’s preparation
Baptism in the Spirit: promised and realised

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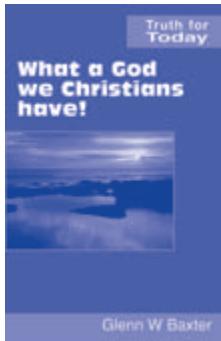
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What a God we Christians have!

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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Alone

"I watch and am like a sparrow alone upon the housetop" (Psalm 102:7).

Picture for a moment the aged apostle Paul in a miserable dungeon in Rome — no gourmet meals or inner spring mattresses or air-conditioning. More important, he was all alone. But now picture a man called Onesiphorus picking his way through the narrow streets and asking enough questions to reach Paul's prison cell. Imagine the sense of gratitude bursting forth from Paul's heart as he describes the whole scene. "He has often refreshed me, and has not been ashamed of my chain; but being in Rome sought me out very diligently, and found me" (2 Timothy 1:16-17).

Thirty years before Paul's imprisonment another prisoner stood all alone. But no-one comforted Him. He looked for sympathy and found none. With nails through His hands and His blessed feet, He hung upon an uplifted cross. Alone. Forsaken of God. Desolate. In a most unique sense He fulfilled the words of Ecclesiastes 4:8, "There is one alone."

Look carefully at this view of our Lord Jesus Christ and remember that He became poor that we might become rich. He was lonely that we might be accepted into divine company. He was made a curse that we might be eternally blessed.

With such a vision before our eyes can we help but share His warm, loving enrichment and blessing with the lonely and the needy — and do it with overflowing joy and deep generosity, even beyond our ability?

Alone—apprehended and taken,
Whilst lovers forsook Him and fled.
Alone—and completely forsaken,
God's judgment was poured on His head.
And yet 'twas for us He endured it,
Alone in perfection was He:
Our blessing—He only secured it,
By dying alone on the tree.

Mrs H.A. Berg

From Grant Steidl, *My Musings* (Beamsville, Ontario, 2009), p.98.

Elijah – The prophet's preparation

I Kings 17:1-9

Gordon Hughes

God is often teaching us the lessons we imagined we had learned already. Elijah needed to learn more about dependence, faith, obedience even after he had fearlessly prophesied of drought before a hostile king. This article began as a Truth for Today radio talk – <http://www.truthfortoday.org.uk/home.html>

Elijah was no superhero. He was “a man with a nature like ours” (James 5:17, NKJV). To become the prophet who at God’s command could challenge all the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18: 36), he first needed to learn in God’s school. He had to learn to trust God for himself before he could encourage firstly a widow, and then challenge a nation, to trust God. We need to learn that same lesson! But what God could do for and with Elijah, He can do for and with you and me!

But first, we need to understand the term “prophet.” Prophets in the Bible had a two-fold function. They were to bring the word of God to His people, especially in times of need, i.e. they were to tell forth God’s word. But sometimes they would be enabled by God to speak of future events, i.e. they would foretell what was to happen. Today, God has given us a complete revelation of Himself in His Son Jesus, the living Word, and in His written word, the Bible. No further revelation as to the future is needed. But we still very much need those who are able to tell forth from God’s word His message for the moment.

Elijah’s fearlessness

Elijah was such a man in his time. We meet him as he starts this ministry. So what was God’s message through him for *that* moment? A most unwelcome one! “As the LORD God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word” (1 Kings 17:1).

Why so dire a pronouncement? Because Ahab (at that time king of Israel) “... did evil in the sight of the LORD, more than all who were before him” (1 Kings 16:30). Not a record to be proud of! As part of his defiance of God, Ahab had married Jezebel, the daughter of the heathen king of Sidon (16:31). Ahab lost no time in moving the nation away from the worship of Jehovah, the true and living God, to Baal, the god of the Sidonians. By this policy “Ahab did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him” (16:32-33).

Ahab's defiance was matched by the people's defiance of God. This seems to be illustrated by Hiel who, during Ahab's reign, "... built Jericho. He laid its foundation with Abiram his firstborn, and with his youngest son Segub he set up its gates, according to the word of the LORD which He had spoken through Joshua the son of Nun" (16:34). That is to say, Hiel defied the curse suspended by Joshua over the children of anyone who rebuilt Jericho, the city which the LORD had doomed to destruction (Joshua 6:17, 26); and reaped the curse in the deaths of two of his sons. It is hard to imagine that Hiel would have been able to embark upon this major undertaking without the knowledge and approval of the king, Ahab. Neither king nor people seem to have been arrested in their course of disobedience by the shocking fulfilment of this curse.

And yet only sixty years had elapsed since the end of the reign of Solomon, during which the nation of Israel had been at its greatest before God. Some of those living under Ahab's reign would have known the glory and splendour of Solomon's reign. And some of us in 2012 have lived long enough to witness a similar departure from God in our own land in less than that time! This is observable not only in steeply declining church attendance, but also in overt public atheism and in changes in the law to encourage things formerly prohibited because God's word did not sanction them.

But God had his man for that day of such massive departure – Elijah! His very name means "Jehovah is God." Was it out of faith that his parents gave him this name as even then the evil of idolatry was raising its ugly head? Did they pray that their child would stand for God? Would to God that in this our day, He might raise up men and women to stand for Him, even amongst the readers of this article!

But what could one man do against such a tide of evil? James lets us into the secret: "Elijah was a man with a



Elijah was no superhero. He was "a man with a nature like ours"



What God could do for and with Elijah, He can do for and with you and me!



nature like ours, and he *prayed earnestly*" (5:17). God did not send a superhero. He sent someone who was already a "man of prayer" when we first meet him.

How did Elijah pray? He was sufficiently in tune with the mind of God to recognise the warning that Moses had previously given the people:

"Take heed to yourselves, lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them, lest the LORD's anger be aroused against you, and He shut up the heavens so that there be no rain, and the land yield no produce, and you perish quickly from the good land which the LORD is giving you"

(Deuteronomy 11:16-17).

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In his longing that the Israelites might yet turn back to God, Elijah prayed *earnestly* that this judgment of God would come as a warning to them (James 5:17). But notice also that Elijah then prayed earnestly for grace, once the people appeared to have returned to the LORD: "he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain" (1 Kings 18:42-44; James 5:18). Elijah was not a man of *casual* prayer, but of *consistent, persevering, fervent*, and consequently *effective* prayer.

And so, in the confidence that God would honour his prayers, Elijah comes into Ahab's presence. Notice again his challenging statement, "As the LORD God of Israel lives, before whom I stand..." (1 Kings 17:1). Elijah might be standing in the presence of the murderous Ahab, but in his mind he was also standing before the living God! And "he could stand before the wicked king because he had knelt before the living God!"¹ Do we know what it is daily to come before the living God in prayer and to learn the mind of God by daily reading His word, so as then to be able to "stand" before the world?

¹ Hamilton Smith, *Elijah. A Prophet of the Lord* (London, 1921, reprinted Morpeth, Scripture Truth Publications, 2007), p.10.

His obedience

Surely such an Elijah was “ready for anything”? And indeed, in His own good time, God would use Elijah to recall the ten tribes of Israel to Himself through the great contest with the prophets of Baal – see 1 Kings 18. Was Elijah already the man for that contest? Not quite yet, it seems. In the thing he was already strong in – faith – he needed a more personally searching, private lesson. So we read,

“Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying, ‘Get away from here and turn eastward, and hide by the Brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan. And it will be that you shall drink from the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there.’ So he went and did according to the word of the LORD, for he went and stayed by the Brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan” (1 Kings 17:2-5).

Notice God’s command: “Get away ... and hide” (17:3). What a valuable instruction for any servant of God! The time would come when it would be right for Elijah to challenge the whole nation on Mount Carmel. Then God would say to His servant, “Show yourself” (1 Kings 18:1). But for now, in this time of preparation, God’s word to His servant was, “Hide yourself.”

No doubt, God was hiding him from Ahab, who at that time was scouring all lands so as to repatriate and execute him (18:10). But there was surely something more to this outwardly inactive period of hiddenness. A young lad went fishing with all he could afford – a stick with some string, a hook and some bait. Just further down river was a man with all the latest expensive fishing tackle. As the day wore on, the lad caught one fish after another; the man caught nothing. So the man asked the lad why he was so much more successful. Quick as a flash, the boy replied, “You need to hide yourself, mister!”



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“Elijah must spend three and a half years in hidden seclusion with God before he spends one day in prominence before men.”² Every servant of God needs to spend time first in His presence in prayer and reading His word. Only in that way will he learn what God wants him to do. Moses had to spend forty years in the obscurity of the desert before he was ready to lead God’s people through the wilderness. As often said, having spent forty years in Egypt learning to be something, he had to spend forty years in the desert learning to be nothing. The apostle Paul also learned the secret of “Hide yourself”. He learned that he was “crucified with Christ,” and, as a result, wrote, “...I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me” (Galatians 2:20).

“Not I, but Christ, be honoured, loved, exalted;
Not I, but Christ, be seen, be known, be heard;
Not I, but Christ, in every look and action;
Not I, but Christ, in every thought and word.”³

So Elijah was told to go to the brook Cherith. There may well have been other places which he would have preferred. But God’s promise to Elijah was, “I have commanded the ravens to feed you *there*” (1 Kings 17:4). There, and there only, was the place of God’s provision. Being east of Jordan but flowing into the Jordan, the brook may well have escaped for a time the drought which fell on the land of Israel.

Beautifully, we read of Elijah, “So he went” (1 Kings 17:5). Is there something God has been saying to you to do but you have not yet done it? Let us learn from Elijah just “to trust and obey.”

His dependence

“The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning, and bread and meat in the evening; and he drank from the brook” (1 Kings 17:6). Each morning and each evening Elijah was brought just sufficient for that meal. Sobering, when we think of our supermarkets, full fridges and freezers! Each evening, as he lay down to sleep, he had to trust God that his breakfast next day would arrive on time! Could these big, greedy, black birds really be trusted to bring food to Elijah? Yes, because Elijah was in the place of God’s appointment. Day by day he proved the faithfulness of God in the daily provision of all his need. “I have commanded the ravens to feed you there” (1 Kings 17:4).

The apostle Paul had proved that same faithfulness of God. He writes, “Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content. I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and

² Smith, p.13.

³ A. A. F. Whiddington, 1855-1933.

in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.” And so he can encourage the Philippians too, “My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4: 11, 12, 19).

George Müller, whose well-known orphanages operated by prayer and faith alone without any appeals for funds, one day had his dependence on God sorely tested. One morning there was no food for breakfast. What were they to do? George had the children sit down for breakfast as usual and gave thanks as usual. Scarcely had he finished when there came a knock on the door. The local baker was passing by when his transport broke down. There was no way now whereby he could get the loaves of bread to his customers. So he left them for the orphans!

But the time came when Elijah’s ordered daily existence was to be shattered. No doubt succumbing to the general drought, “after a while... the brook dried up” (1 Kings 17:7). Now what was Elijah to do? Interestingly, the name “Cherith” means “cutting.” It really seems as though every prop on which Elijah might be tempted to lean was being cut away from him. “The prophet must learn to trust in God rather than in the gifts He gives.”⁴

Without water Elijah would undoubtedly perish. What was he to do? God had certainly not forgotten His servant and had made provision for his need – but in Sidon, where Jezebel had come from! (1 Kings 16:31; 17:9) He had to learn to trust God in that dangerous heartland of idolatry, become beholden to a starving widow to hide him, and be moved even to cry to the God of resurrection (17:10-24). Only then would he be ready for the unnerving task God had for him to do (1 Kings 18:36).

But remember that we started this article with James’ description of Elijah as “a man just like us.” If we are following the Lord, each of us, in our own way, is being prepared by God for the next task He has for us. May we, too, be characterised by that same fearlessness, obedience and dependence that marked Elijah!

⁴ Smith, p.15.



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No other gospel

Galatians chapter 1

Stephen Thomson

As professing Christianity shrinks, the temptation to compromise on the gospel for the sake of solidarity increases. Paul didn't compromise. This article is also taken from a "Truth for Today" radio talk.

Paul's pain

"Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye obey not the truth?" "O foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you?" (Galatians 5:7 & 3:1, KJV) From these two verses we can see that very early in the history of the church something had gone badly wrong, certainly in Galatia. These are pretty strong words spoken by the apostle. Whatever had gone wrong? We don't have to read too far in Galatians 1 before we find the problem. They had become victims to false teachers who had preached "another gospel," which really wasn't "good news" at all but had stumbled them (1:6).

The speed at which Paul moves through the opening verses is an indication of the seriousness of the problem. There was a battle to be fought and, just like the shepherd boy David running to meet the giant (1 Samuel 17:48), Paul is in a hurry

to get to grips with the evil doctrine which was working in them. In Galatians 5:9 he uses the figure of leaven leavening the whole lump. The picture is one of making bread, and once leaven (or yeast) is introduced into the dough it permeates the whole mixture. Leaven always typifies evil. The Galatians had embraced bad doctrine, and that, if unchecked, would permeate the whole company of believers – leading to spiritual ruin. What a warning for us to be on our guard today as there are those who teach (often misquoting Scripture) things which are both morally and doctrinally opposed to the Word of God!

Paul knew the believers he was writing to. He had preached the gospel of Christ to them. He loved them; they were his brothers and sisters in Christ, and it pained him that they were being seduced by false preachers with a false message. I understand that "Galatia" probably

Paul knew the believers he was writing to.

includes the cities of Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. Speaking in the synagogue in Antioch Paul had said, “Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins. And by him all that believe are justified from all things from which ye could not be justified by the Law of Moses” (Acts 13:38-39). Clear, concise and unequivocal words. They believed it then, why not now? Why had the gospel of Christ become insufficient in any way to them? By emphasising that his apostleship was not “of man, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father” (1:1), Paul emphasises his apostolic authority over against this false gospel. Correspondingly, his gospel was not from man, but from God (1:11). It was the authentic gospel – anything else was worthless and a counterfeit.

You can hear the apostle’s frustration and pain as he reminds them that the Lord Jesus Christ was the One “who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of God our Father, to whom be

glory for ever and ever” (Galatians 1:4). Yet they had turned aside to “another gospel”:

“I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed” (1: 6, 9).

Adding the Law to Christ

What had these Galatians done that had upset the apostle so much? Had they given up Christ and the gospel of grace which Paul had preached? Well no – not exactly. What they had done was to mix up the grace of God with the keeping of the Law. Evidently Jewish teachers, professing Christians, had come to them teaching that as well as having Christ, they needed to keep the Law. This mixed message was leading

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false preachers with a false message.*

them away from Christ and from the principle of salvation by grace alone. Now, before we get too critical of these believers, let us look around at the Christian church today and into our own hearts. Is there not something appealing to the mind of a religious person in the notion that we can do something in order to merit God's favour? How many there are today who say they believe the Bible, they believe in God – they may even say that they believe in the atoning death of the Lord Jesus Christ upon the cross, and yet still try to gain salvation through their own efforts!

Under the terms of the Law, God's dictate was "This *do* and you shall live" (Luke 10:28; cp. Deuteronomy 30:16ff; Ezekiel 20:11, 21). But however hard men tried, they found it impossible to keep the Law. They had to learn the futility of trying to keep it as a way to gaining eternal life.

The Law has been described as a plumb-line. A builder may hold a plumb-line against a crooked wall and see exactly where it is crooked, but the plumb-line can't make the wall straight! This is the objective of

the Law – it tells us we're wrong but can't make us right! To sum it up, Paul says in Romans 3:20, "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight; for by the law is the knowledge of sin." Here then is the reason why the Law was given – to make man realise his sinful condition, and his inability to do anything to help himself. He must rely wholly on the mercy and goodness of God.

The reality is that, although there is in the heart of man a desire to do something in order to gain God's favour, our efforts are all in vain! Take Cain and Abel as an example (Genesis 4:1-15). Abel grasped the right way to approach a holy God, and offered a lamb (which of course to God prefigured the death of His Son), and God accepted his offering. Cain laboured hard and by the sweat of his brow brought an offering of the "fruit of the ground" before God. God had no respect for his offering.

Now that we have been brought to Christ we no longer need the Law. To some Christians this will sound strange but it is what the Bible teaches! Trying to *do* something will

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we can do something to merit God's favour?*

only hinder us in our approach to God. We need to realise that any suggestion of our being able to do anything is offensive to God. If there was the slightest chance that we could merit salvation by our own efforts, do you think God would have sent His only begotten Son to die such a terrible death on a Roman cross? The fact that the Lord Jesus Christ came to this world and died on the cross of Calvary is evidence that man was incapable of anything which could bring him to God.

Although these Galatian believers had not given up Christ altogether, they had been persuaded to believe that as well as having Christ they had to keep the Law. As I have already said, there is a part of us that willingly responds to that kind of message – which is not a gospel, and must always be rejected. Let us refuse any who preach that we need to add to the work of Christ for our salvation. “Let him be accursed,” says the apostle (Galatians 1:8-9).

The gospel Paul preached

If anyone had reason to hang on to the Law and the rituals of Judaism you would think it was Saul of

Tarsus. But his meeting with the Lord Jesus on the Damascus road (Acts 9:1-9) had changed him forever! Paul himself was a 500-pence debtor (see Luke 7:36-50) and he knew it! He declares, “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners,” adding, “of whom I am chief” (1 Timothy 1:15). There had been a day in his life when the conviction of “Thou shalt not covet” (Exodus 20:17) had come home to him, and at that point, he says, “Sin revived, and I died.” He found that “the commandment, which was ordained to life” became death to him (Romans 7: 7-10). What Paul insisted on to the Galatians was something which through deepest soul-exercise he had first learned for himself. His preaching was not tailored to suit either the company or the occasion. He preached the same gospel to kings and nobles as well as to prisoners and slaves. God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34) and the gospel of His grace is to “whosoever will” (Revelation 22:17).

In 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 we have a very clear record of the gospel he

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preached. “Moreover, brethren I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you... by which also ye are saved..., how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the scriptures.”

This is the authentic gospel of Christ. I want to conclude with three points that are its essence.

Our sins

If we want to understand the gospel we firstly have to take instruction from “the scriptures of truth” concerning what sin is and what its effects are. I say this because man’s thoughts in relation to these things have moved in opposition to God’s thoughts, especially in the last fifty years or so in our country. Many people will tell you that they don’t believe in God, and as a consequence they reject the concepts of both sin and sins. Sadly even some church groups seem very reluctant to teach what the Bible says in relation to sins. The book of Judges closes with the sorry words that, as a result of there being no king in Israel, every man did that which was right in his own eyes (Judges 21:25).

For “no king” we can substitute “no God and no Bible.”

Things that are now commonplace in society, and promoted, would have been reproved half a century ago. This is the result of men and women giving up God and His Word, and following their own desires. Men and women are not “naturally good,” as many would think today. Just as a dog barks because it is its nature to do so, we commit sin because of our fallen nature. We inherit a sinful nature from our parents and this can be traced back to the garden of Eden when our first parents fell by disobeying God (Romans 5:19, cp. Genesis 3:1-7). If you want to test this, just think of a child – any child: do they need to be taught to be naughty? Of course not! But we cannot put the blame for our sins on our parents, any more than a criminal can escape justice by blaming his genes! The Bible says, “For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

Now this kind of message is very unpopular today – it’s old fashioned, outdated, restrictive – but it is God’s Word. Unless men and

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bore our judgement, and is our Substitute.*

women realise that sin is what God says it is in His Word, that *they* are sinners, and that the effect of sin is judgment (Hebrews 9:27), they will not turn to God in repentance, which is the first requirement for salvation (Acts 20:21).

Christ died for our sins

We need to understand the work which Jesus Christ did when He died on the cross of Calvary. On the cross He gave a very full answer to the question of sin, and made it possible for a holy God to be able to forgive our sins. The Lord Jesus was uniquely able to do this because of His unique sinless perfection.

The New Testament writers give a wonderful witness to this.

- Paul, the intellect, says that He “knew no sin” (2 Corinthians 5:21);
- Peter, the action-man, says, “He did no sin” (1 Peter 2:22); and
- John, the beloved, says, “In Him is no sin” (1 John 3:5).

It is marvellous how the Scriptures blend to bring out the worth of the Son of God, the only One capable to be the sin-Bearer and our

Substitute! As a result of His death and resurrection, the Lord Jesus Christ has set a basis on which a holy and righteous God can freely forgive sinners (Romans 3:25-26). He was our Substitute. “Christ indeed has once suffered for sins, the just One for the unjust ones” (1 Peter 3:18, see Darby Trans. margin). I’m sure we all understand the idea of a substitute. In football or rugby, one player leaves the pitch and is replaced by another who takes their place. *Christ* took our place, bore our judgement, and is our Substitute.

Believing

And finally there has to be faith – faith *alone*, not faith plus Law, or works, or rituals! The Bible clearly says, “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast” (Ephesians 2:8). Faith is trust and believing, taking God at His word. “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31).

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Fishing, feeding, following

David Taylor

This moving study of the public restoration of Peter to the Lord's service in John 21 is at once encouraging, and uncomfortably close to home.

The last chapter of John almost reads like an afterthought. But there are no afterthoughts with the Spirit of God! It is an epilogue written by the Spirit of God to help us to imbibe that *risen life* in the *risen Christ* of which we learned in chapter 20,¹ and live it out now in accordance with the divine will. John, as it seems to me, writes about heavenly truths for heavenly people, but people who are here on earth. And in this chapter we get service for the Lord here on earth, and situations that arise in our service. And, so far as my own experiences are concerned, I must say very feelingly how much the experiences retold in this chapter are an encouragement to me, and I trust to readers also.

Perhaps we can summarise the three main lessons of this chapter with the three words,

- Fishing,
- Feeding, and
- Following.

Every one of us has responsibilities in these areas. We need to fish – we need to bear fruit. We need to feed one another. And certainly we all need to follow Christ.

Let's look at these verses.

Fishing

The Lord had said He would meet the disciples in Galilee (Matthew 26:32; cp. 28:7), and so here they are, at the sea of Tiberias. Only seven are mentioned, two of them unnamed. Where someone is not named, it's often good to put yourself in, because this brings the situation home to yourself. However Simon Peter is named, as are Thomas, Nathanael, and James and John. Simon Peter, the impetuous “mover and shaker,” who sometimes says the wrong thing. Thomas, the doubter, the cautious man who says, “I'm not too sure about this!” Nathanael, of whom the Lord said, “Behold! an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!” (John 1:47, NKJV). And John, the contemplative sort. We recognise these characters in the assemblies of God's people, don't we? And here they are, *together*.

¹ Concerning this, see the writer's article, “The newness of resurrection,” in the October 2011 issue.

The problem, however, was that the Lord Himself had not appeared. And Peter, very much the leader, says, “I’m going fishing.”

Fishing, Peter? Fishing? Don’t you remember how the Lord called you when you were mending your nets, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men”? (Matthew 4:19) Are you going back to your old occupation? But Peter is the leader, and the others say, “We’ll come with you.” Very solemn, isn’t it? Our example may be very significant for good, or for brethren to go astray through.

“But when the morning came” (John 21:4). These men were successful fishermen, for the Zebedee fishing business had hired servants (Mark 1:20). But that night they caught absolutely nothing. They were on the wrong job! Then the Lord appears on the shore in the mists of the morning, and says, “Have you any food?” as if to say, “Lads, have you caught anything?” “No.” And here we have to make an application to our personal and assembly lives, and ask, “Is the Lord really *in* what we are doing? Is He the One alone whom we desire to serve?”

“And He said to them, ‘Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.’ So they cast, and now they were not able to draw it in because of the multitude of fish” (v.6).

At first they didn’t recognise who it was on the shore, and we can be similarly unperceptive when we get away from the Lord. But then John did recognise Him, though not, I think, because of good eyesight. Rather, it was the wonder of the grace and power that made this event the eighth sign-miracle of John’s Gospel and indicated who the Person on the shore really was. The disciple who said, “It is the Lord”, was, in his own words, “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (v.7). This is a relationship that faith claims, not one conferred as special privilege. John, we might say, recognised the sign-miracle because he best knew the Lord’s heart.

It’s a good thing to get back to the point from which so often we’ve got away. The Lord is still there and wants to



*That
night
they
caught
absolutely
nothing.*



*They
were on
the wrong
job!*



bless. What does Peter do? I'm sure he now remembered the strangely similar circumstances in which he had once said, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Luke 5:4-10). But Peter doesn't say that now. He *plunges* into the sea – it's a very active word. He couldn't get quick enough to the Lord.

"Jesus saith unto them, Come and dine" (John 21:12, KJV). The wonderful thing is that He tells them to bring what they've caught – 153 fish. I don't know what 153 signifies. But it certainly implied that every fish caught was accounted for! Wonderful to think that Christ knows of every soul that has been won for Him! And as you and I through grace are allowed one day to meet Him on that further shore, *how many will we have* to bring home to Him? He's the One that brings them to the net. But He's the One here who gives them the credit for what they'd done – wonderful Lord! The meal is all ready. The Lord has made the fire, got the bread, even got some fish. And He says, "Come and dine."

Feeding

No doubt Peter looked at that fire. Where did he last see one like that? Excluding heaping coals of fire on somebody's head, the only other New-Testament mention of "fire of coals" concerns the high priest's palace (John 18:18). A few days before Peter had seen that other fire of coals. A painful recollection; but how different here!

The Lord has provided everything and they've eaten it. Peter is refreshed. And now the Lord says to him, "Simon, son of Jonah."

In one sense, what is about to happen is not his restoration. He's been restored before. Restoration already commenced when "the Lord turned, and looked at Peter," so that "Peter went out and wept bitterly" (Luke 22:61-62); when Jesus said to the women, "Go tell my disciples – *and Peter*" (Mark 16:7); and when the Lord met Peter privately (Luke 24:34). We will never know what transpired at that private restoration of Peter. But here in John 21 the Lord wishes still to use him, and therefore to restore him publicly to His service. The other disciples might well have said, "Peter? Look what he did. He denied You with oaths and curses! Peter?" Ah, the Lord has got something special for Peter to do. And this is where we get the beautiful pictures of the feeding and of the following.

The Lord says to him, "Simon, son of Jonah." Three times He says, "Simon!" He uses his old name because the problem is the old *Simon*. So often we have to be reminded of our old selves. Peter had denied His Lord, despite being *told* that he would do it. He had vehemently repudiated the idea, and had meant this absolutely through and through. But there was that "me" problem. How many times did he deny Him? I believe it's many, many more times than three.

Restoration is a protracted and painful work; and this part of Peter's restoration had to be conducted publicly.

In verses 15-17 there are three especially significant words: "love," "feed," and "know." In fact, the Lord uses two words for "love" as He probed Peter's heart to the very bottom. It is interesting to study these carefully. He says (v. 15), "Do you love me more than these?" This word for "love," denotes the love that is associated with our *will*, not an emotional love. It is the word characteristically used for the love of God in the New Testament. The Lord says, "Do you love me with that will, with all that strength? Do you love me more than all these that are around?" But Peter replies with a different word. "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you" - using a word of brotherly love, of natural affection, and implying that if I love you, you will love me.² Peter says, "You know I'm attached to You." "He said to him, 'Feed my lambs.'"

In verse 16 the Lord repeats the same question in the same words; Peter replies in the same words. But a wider task is imparted: "Tend my sheep." Then (v.17) "He said to him the third time, 'Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me?' But here the Lord adopts the same word for "love" that Peter is using. "Do you really even have affection for me, when you said all those things, Simon?" "Peter was grieved..." (v.17), and replied, "Lord, you know all things. You know that I love you." The word Peter uses for "love" is the one he has previously used, but there are two different words for "know." The first is perhaps "know" in a general sense; but "you know" means, "Lord, you can see me through and through. Nobody else knows, but You know I love you." "He said, 'Feed my sheep.'"

What does this tell us? That love for the Lord is the motive for this service of feeding and tending. It's easy to enter service for the Lord because we enjoy it. Sooner or later, that service will become onerous. On a personal level, I feel that at times. Or because we love the brethren. Great thing to love



*The
Lord
says to
him,
"Simon."*



*He uses
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name
because
the
problem
is the
old
Simon.*



² It has been doubted whether in ordinary usage the meanings of these words can be clearly demarcated. But the variation in this passage seems deliberate (Ed.).



*"My sheep,
My lambs."*



*There
should be a
ministry,
underpinned
by our love
for Christ,
of feeding
those who
are His.*



the brethren! Every Christian is a brother in Christ. But we'll get disappointed and despondent. The only place where we can get back to is to say, "Lord, I'm doing this because I love You."

You might have thought that Peter wasn't the man to look after the sheep or the lambs. But the Lord had probed him to his very depth, and the old, self-life Peter, that bold, brash Peter, had gone completely. The Lord had probed his love right to the very depths, and here was the man to "feed my sheep." Why was such probing needed? Notice the repetition of "my" – "They're Mine: My sheep, My lambs." There should be a ministry, underpinned by our love for Christ, of feeding those who are *His*. That makes all the difference.

Following

Before his fall Peter had been very sure what *he* would do. He had said, "I'll die for you, Lord" (John 13:37). In verse 18 the Lord says, in effect, When you were younger, you did this and that. Soon you will be old, and one day "another will gird you [the thought here is of being put in chains] and carry you where you do not wish." "You will stretch out your arms." According to church tradition – and there's no reason to doubt it – Peter was crucified – as it says here, "This he spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God" (v.19). What bold Peter had promised, humbled Peter would fulfil by grace. The Lord took him at his word and even privileged him to go the same way that his Master went. I love the little poem about Matthew the tax collector:

"I heard His call, "Come, follow." That was all.
My gold grew dim; my heart went after Him.
Who would not follow if they heard *His* call?"

What about you? What about me? All of us have the privilege – rather, the responsibility – to follow in the footsteps of the Lord who died for us and is now living at the right hand of God for us. To follow means to be obedient, to be close to Him. But following may mean difficulties. A brother from south Asia recently told us

that the first thing they had to teach people in his country when they came to Christ was how they would suffer. I don't suppose any of us have ever been called to suffer like that. But, really, to be true to Christ will mean suffering of one kind or another. And here the word to us too is, "Follow me" (v.22).

But Peter is still Peter, speaking the first thing on his mind! Seeing John, he says, "What about this man?" (v.21) I doubt that Peter is complaining about John. Rather he's thinking, "If this will be my privilege, what about John?" Nevertheless, the Lord has to rebuke him. "What is that to you?" (v.22) And, *whatever our opinion of the service of others, the point is, "You follow me."* This is important for our service. Service to the Lord is intensely personal; this chapter is intensely personal.

The Gospel ends with the wonderful words, "I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written." "Many other things Jesus did." John's Gospel is full of the wonder of His Person. But how many days do we read about in John's Gospel, or all the Gospels? Very few. For thirty-three perfect years the Lord Jesus moved here in obedience to the will of God. Will all the "other things that Jesus did" be forgotten? I believe the "hidden manna" promised to the overcomer in Pergamum (Revelation 2:17) is all those "other things." Throughout eternity we will ever enquire into all that He did when He was down here. "Manna" means "What is it?" (Exodus 16:15, 31). And we shall never measure the dimension of the wonder and the greatness of the Person of Christ. What a glorious contemplation for eternity!

To conclude:

Fishing. Are we occupied with matters we have allowed to take the first place that Christ should have? Is He the pre-eminent One? Does His pre-eminence yield fruit for Him in all my occupations?

Feeding: how concerned are we about feeding and tending the flock of God? Remember, the motive for it all is love, love for Christ. We'll get despondent with one another. But will we ever be tired of that love of Christ, that went after us until it found us? (cp. Luke 15:4)

Following:

"By and by, I shall look on His face,
That beautiful face, that thorn-shadowed face,
By and by I shall look on His face,
And I'll wish I had given Him more."

Nothing down here will seem of significance when we see that face which was so marred. I'm sure we'll fall down, and wish we'd given Him everything.

Baptism in the Spirit: promised and realised

David Anderson

“Scripture should be interpreted by Scripture.” This basic principle is applied here to a phrase that has received divergent interpretations. A later article, God willing, will ask what the baptism in the Spirit means for us.

“So you don’t believe in the baptism of the Spirit.”¹ This was the retort from a believer I once chanced to meet, when I declared my “brethren” affiliation. “Yes, I most certainly do,” I chuckled, “But obviously not in the way you think of it!”

But what “we” believe or “they” believe is not what matters.

“What does the Scripture say?”

After listing in 1 Corinthians 12:7-10 the variety of spiritual gifts evident in the Christian church, Paul writes,

“All these [gifts] are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as He wills. 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. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and all were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but of many” (verses 11-14, ESV).

Two points follow from this. Firstly, that the baptism of (really, “in”) the Spirit is the means by which *all* believers are formed into the church, here called the body of Christ. The idea that some can be believers, i.e., members of the body of Christ, but not baptised in the Spirit misunderstands this passage. The second point is that it was brought about by the sovereign action of the Spirit of God, who empowers the church to act together as a whole – just like the human body where “God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as He chose...there are many parts, yet one body” (verses 18 & 20).

Historical review

But I’d like to take a step back into the Gospels to establish where and when the baptism of the Spirit was first mentioned. It was during the ministry of John the Baptist. John’s preaching had aroused the expectations of the Jews. They thought that he might be

¹ The commonly used expression “baptism of the Spirit” is employed throughout this article. More accurately, it should be “baptism in [or, with] the Spirit” – the Spirit being the medium of the baptism and the ascended Lord the baptiser (cp. “the baptism of John”, Matthew 21:25, where the medium is water and John Baptist is the baptiser).

their Messiah (Luke 3:15). But John put the record straight. He said,

“I baptise you with water, but He who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in His hand, to clear His threshing floor and to gather the wheat into His barn, but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire” (Luke 3:16-17).

God had given John Baptist a special sign so that he would recognise the Messiah [Christ] when He appeared.

“I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on Him. I myself did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptise with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is He who baptises with the Holy Spirit.’ And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God” (John 1:32-34).

When did this “baptism with the Holy Spirit” take place? The answer is found in the Lord’s own words as recorded by Luke at the beginning of his second book:

“To [the disciples] He presented Himself alive after His suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. And while staying with them He ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for *the promise of the Father*, which, He said, ‘you

heard from Me; for John baptized with water, but *you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit* not many days from now” (Acts 1:3-5).

Indeed, Luke records, at the end of his first book, that as the Lord Jesus prepared His disciples for life without Him on earth, He promised they would be endowed with power from on high (Luke 24:49). And just on the brink of His ascension the Lord reiterated this promise to disciples still preoccupied with the fate of their nation (Acts 1:6),

“It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by His own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:7-8).

Plainly, then, these texts can only refer to the events of Pentecost, ten days after the Ascension.

Similarly, having recorded John Baptist’s words in 1:33 (see above), John the Evangelist explains that the Spirit would be given after Jesus had been glorified (7:39). Then during the Upper Room Discourse, the Lord Himself confirmed that His going back to God would result in the Father sending the Helper, the Holy Spirit, who would dwell with the disciples and who would also be in them (14:16-17 & 26 with 16:7 & 13). The Spirit would usher in an entirely new

The baptism of the Spirit occurred on the day of Pentecost.

era for them. We can now call this “the Spirit’s day”, on the basis of the term “that day” in 14:20; 16:23 & 26.

Therefore these last words of the Lord Jesus, both before His death and before His ascension, definitely show that the baptism of the Spirit occurred on the day of Pentecost.

What happened at Pentecost?

Acts 2:1-4 gives the historical details of what happened that day. In obedience to the Lord’s command to remain in Jerusalem, the whole group of one hundred and twenty disciples was together in a house, when “suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting” (Acts 2:2). Divided tongues as of fire appeared and rested on each one of them. At that point each was filled with the Holy Spirit, who enabled them to speak in other tongues.

Soon a crowd of inquisitive festive Jews gathered to see and hear what was happening. In his preaching to the assembled crowd, Peter explained that they had witnessed something which they knew from the prophet Joel to be going to happen to the restored nation of Israel in the future. About those last days, God had

declared: “that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams” (Acts 2:17; cp. Joel 2:28). Peter emphasised that the amazing event they had just witnessed was from the Jesus of Nazareth, whom they had so recently crucified. It was He, the exalted Lord and Christ, who had “poured out” the Holy Spirit. God had exalted Christ to His right hand. And being there, Christ had received the promised Holy Spirit from His Father (Acts 2:23, 32-33). The good news for the crowd that day was that they, too, could receive the Spirit by faith: “Peter said to them, ‘Repent and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise [of the Holy Spirit] is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself’” (vv.38-39).

The widening out of Pentecost

However, all the converts on the day of Pentecost were Jews, either from the locality of Jerusalem and Judea, or from the Dispersion and visiting Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost. There were no Gentile converts. It

was not until Peter preached in Cornelius' house at Caesarea (Acts 10) that any Gentiles became Christians. That preaching took place a few years after Pentecost. But the result was exactly the same as at Pentecost:

"While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the [Jewish] believers... who had come with Peter were amazed, because *the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles*. For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, 'Can anyone withhold water for baptising these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?' And he commanded them to be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 10:44-48, italics added).

Most importantly, Peter confirmed that this pouring out of the Spirit was equivalent to Pentecost when he recounted the whole Cornelius incident to the church back in Jerusalem. He said that when he began to speak the message of salvation to them, the Holy Spirit:

"fell on them *just as on us* at the beginning [i.e., on the day of Pentecost]. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, 'John baptised with water, but you will be *baptised with the Holy Spirit*.' If then God gave the *same gift* to them as he gave to us

when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?" Acts 11:15-17).

Acts 8:14-17 records the reception of the Holy Spirit by the Samaritan converts, once Peter and John had prayed for them; and Acts 19:1-6 records the reception of the Spirit by twelve disciples of John Baptist at Ephesus when Paul laid hands on them. Nowhere else is this kind of public reception of the Holy Spirit recorded; in no place, moreover, is it recorded of a single individual, only of these four groups identified in Acts. The reason for the special experience of the Samaritans is probably analogous to that of the household of Cornelius.² The early Jewish believers needed strong evidence to accept that Samaritans, descendants of the foreigners by whom the Assyrians had repopulated the lands of the ten tribes, could also be part of the church (contrast Ezra 4:1-3). In the case of the twelve disciples of John Baptist the reason probably was to underscore the important truth that, great as John was, his ministry alone could not bring his adherents into "the Spirit's day". The *accomplished* death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, of which the descent of the Spirit was a consequence, were necessary to do this (cp. Luke 7:28 with Acts 19:4-6).

² To counteract Jewish prejudice, Peter took with him six brethren as triple witness, and subsequently testimony, to these extraordinary events (cp. Acts 11:12 & 18).

“With all his saints”

I Thessalonians 3:13 & 4:14

Theo Balderston

This article commences a defence of the doctrine of “the rapture” in Thessalonians.

“So that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints” (1 Thessalonians 3:13, NKJV).

“For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with him those who sleep in Jesus” (4:14).

Paul’s spiritual genius, if we may so term it, was to base the most practical exhortation or encouragement on the most profound truths. To motivate the Philippians not to elbow each other out of the way he expounds the “mind of Christ” which took Him from the glory of Godhead to a cross of shame (2:4-8). And he brought the whole scope of the gospel to bear on the slack behaviour of Crete’s Christian slaves (Titus 2:9-14). Similarly here: he spurs the newly converted Thessalonians on to personal holiness by the thought that one day they will be the “saints” who come with the Lord in resurrection glory, and he comforts them over the death of some of their Christian friends with the assurance that these will necessarily be included in that coming.

“With all his saints”

To consider 1 Thessalonians 3:13 first. Note that “holiness” and “saints” are different formations from the same verbal root in Greek. At the Lord’s coming in glory the Thessalonians will definitely be among His “holy ones,” for they have not been appointed to wrath (5:9; cp. 1:10). But have you ever been part of a procession with the uncomfortable feeling that you don’t quite belong in it? Paul braces the Thessalonians to live *now* so that nothing in their post-conversion record would make them feel out of place in that glorious train of “holy ones.” He prays for them, confident that the Lord Himself will work the needed change in them to prepare them for that day.

Against this interpretation many, perhaps most, scholars interpret the “saints” of 3:13 as angels. This is because it resembles the “all his saints with him” of Zechariah 14:5. Certainly the Lord Himself spoke of His coming “and all the angels with him” (Matthew 25:31; cp. Mark 8:38). But the word used for “saints” in Zechariah 14:5 is used elsewhere in the OT to refer to both human beings and angels (cp. Psalms 16:3; 34:9; Daniel 8:13). 2 Thessalonians 1:10 mentions both “saints” and “all them that believe.” Are these the same people, or does “saints” in this verse mean angels? The latter is unlikely, seeing that in verse 7, when Paul

means angels, he writes “angels.” Most commentators think that “saints” and “them that believe” in verse 10 are the same people (notice the parallel with “glorified in you,” verse 12). And if “saints” means believers in 2 Thessalonians 1:10, then Paul never uses “saints” to mean anything other than believers in all his letters, unless in 1 Thessalonians 3:13. This is a near-conclusive argument that “saints” means believers in 1 Thessalonians 3:13 too.

The closest parallel to Zechariah 14:5 is Matthew 25:31. Here the Lord changed “saints” to “angels,” implying that the disciples would not ordinarily have understood “saints” to mean angels. This reinforces the likelihood that if Paul had wanted his readers to understand 1 Thessalonians 3:13 to refer to angels, he too would have written “angels,” just as he did in 2 Thessalonians 1:7. And whilst 1 Thessalonians 3:13 makes good sense if “saints” means believers (see above), why would he introduce angels into the verse unless to terrify his readers into holiness? But he was not intending to terrify them (see 5:9).

From all this I conclude that in 1 Thessalonians 3:13 “saints” means believers.

The word for “coming” (*parousia*) denotes more the “arrival” part of a “coming” than the “setting-out” part (e.g. 2 Corinthians 7:6). Perhaps, then, the saints will be raptured to join the Lord just as He “arrives”? But it would be rather misleading to describe such a meeting as “the Lord’s arrival with all his saints.” *Parousia* can also mean “presence” (e.g. 2 Corinthians 10:10). This nuance reminds us that before His *parousia* the Lord is absent from the world (something that could not be said of the saints if they were just raptured *at* His arrival in glory). The world rejected Christ, and Jehovah said to Him, “Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool” (Psalm 110:1). Many Christians feel uncomfortable with this truth, but it is fundamental to our walk in this world. And whilst the Lord promises to be with *believers* till the end of the age (Matthew 28:20), and by faith we see Him glorified (Hebrews 2:9), yet in another sense Christ is still absent from us too, and still the bride says, “Come, Lord Jesus!” (Revelation 22:20)

And thus *parousia* is used both for the Lord’s coming with and for His saints (1 Thessalonians 3:13; 4:15).

“Even so”

1 Thessalonians 4:14 is the key to the meaning of verses 15-17.

Evidently the Thessalonians had not expected the death of any Christians before the ardently awaited coming of the Lord (1 Thessalonians 1:10). Since they sorrowed “as others who have no hope” (4:13), it seems that they did not expect to meet their deceased brethren again at His coming.

Paul’s reassurance comes immediately. In ringing terms he affirms in verse 14 that deceased believers too will come with Christ in glory. He anchors this assurance to Jesus’ death and resurrection by an “even so.” This “even so” either means, “If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so [we also believe that]



*In what
sense
would the
deceased
be said to
meet the
Lord in
the air in
verse 17,
if in verse
14 they
are
contem-
plated as
having
just come
with
Him?*



God will bring...” On this reading there is a reason why if we believe the first we must also believe the second. Or it just means “even so God will bring...,” in which case it means that believers will return in the same manner as Jesus died and rose.

If the latter, it simply means that *dead* saints will come back as *risen* saints, just as Jesus died and rose. But if the former, the “even so” probably points to some necessary implication of Jesus’ death and resurrection, such that if, on the apostolic testimony, we believe this happened we commit equally to believing that God will bring the sleeping saints with Jesus. What implication? Notice that the first half tells us what Jesus did: He died and rose again. The second tells us what God will do – must do – in response to what Jesus did. God must glorify His Son when He comes in triumph, by bringing with Him those who have fallen asleep. Certainly living and changed believers will show that Christ’s resurrection abolishes death (cp. 1 Corinthians 15:51ff). But only by bringing the dead saints as *raised* saints will God fully display the magnitude of Christ’s victory over death (cp. John 11:25-26).

But, furthermore, in verse 16 Paul writes of “the dead *in Christ*” (4:16). This implies that the saints’ coming with the Lord is a corollary of their being “in Christ.” God already so entirely identifies believers with Christ in His death and resurrection (Romans 6:5; Colossians 2:10-12; 3:1-4) that they will necessarily also be identified with Him in His coming again. “For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”¹ The dead in Christ cannot *but* come with Him!

This rationale may be hinted at in the wording of verse 14. Many scholars link the “*in Jesus*” (strictly “through Jesus”) of verse 14 with the “bring,” and translate, “For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through

¹ Assuming that in Zechariah 14:5 “saints” means or includes believers, this implies that OT saints will share in the rapture. Are they therefore also to be viewed as “in Christ”? This not Paul’s concern here, and it would take us too far afield to discuss it.

Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep” (ESV). This would mean that due to all that Jesus is as dead and risen, the currently sleeping saints will be brought with Him. It would therefore be an odd thing if it meant that, Jesus having died and risen, *unresurrected* saints will be brought back with Him, i.e., as disembodied souls.

This is how verse 14 is commonly misunderstood. Many recent evangelical scholarly commentators think that it only refers to God bringing the souls of deceased saints with Jesus to be reunited with their own raised bodies, and then raptured to appear with Him in glory.² This might seem to be supported by 2 Thessalonians 1:7 & 10, where the Lord comes from heaven with the angels of His power, and the saints are mentioned only once He is visible to the world. But it spoils the inner logic of 1 Thessalonians 4:14. If we consider the second interpretation given above of the “even so,” then the return of unclothed souls is not a return that matches Jesus’ death and resurrection. If we take the first interpretation, then there is no intrinsic reason why, Jesus having died and risen, God must bring their disembodied souls back *with Him*. At best it is a preliminary to what does match Jesus’ death and resurrection, and is God’s necessary answer to the work of Christ, namely, the raising of the bodies of the dead saints in verse 16. But if verse 14 only describes a preliminary to this, the ringing terms in which Paul affirms it are inappropriate, and such language ought to have been deferred to verse 16. Verse 14 (on this interpretation) puts the emphasis on the wrong place, on the detail of the return of unclothed spirits. Paul’s consolation of the Thessalonians could better have omitted the unnecessary detail of this verse and jumped straight from verse 13 to verse 15.

In fact, Paul is not thinking of disembodied souls; he is thinking about dead saints interred in the soil! If he had meant disembodied souls in verse 14, consistency would require him to write, “The *dead bodies* of those who come with Christ will be raised first” in verse 16. But he says, “the dead in Christ” just as in verse 14 he says that “*Jesus* died and rose again,” and “those who *sleep*.” Elsewhere of course Paul does identify believers with their unclothed spirits (2 Corinthians 5:4, 8, 9; Philippians 1:23). But throughout 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17 his undivided focus is on resurrection; hence He views both the Lord and believers as *those who rise*: i.e., he identifies their P/persons with their *bodies*. And this includes verse 14.

And in what sense would the deceased be said to *meet* the Lord in the air in verse 17, if in v.14 they are contemplated as having just *come with* Him? This interpretation is a non-starter. It is true that in 4:14 he only mentions the dead in Christ. But this is because his immediate objective is consolation of the bereaved.

² Notice that this implies the strange conception of resurrection happening by the infusion of the soul into the changed body.

In 3:13 he wrote, “With *all* his saints,” i.e., including the living too.


*If one
saint
“in
Christ”
were
missed
out on
that
glorious
day,
His
glory
would
be
spoiled.*



Another interpretation of 4:14 has it describing a movement which only *commences* “in the air” once the Lord has raised and raptured believers up to Him. But verse 16 expressly says that the Lord will descend *from heaven*. If verse 14 merely refers to the short journey back to the earth of saints who have only just left the earth to *meet* the Lord (see v.17), this could not be described as God bringing them with Him. In any case the passage never mentions a descent from the air to the earth.

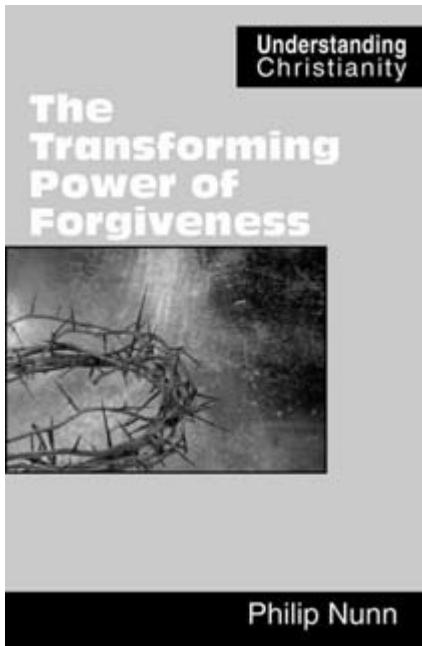
Thus these various attempts to merge the “with Him” of v.14 with the rapture described in vv.15-17 are unsatisfactory.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-14 commences a section of the epistle concerning the Lord’s coming which ends at 5:10-11. Verse 5:10 – “Who died for us, that, whether we wake [or, “watch”] or sleep, we should live together *with him*” – balances 4:14; it summarises the rationale of 4:14 in terms of the Lord’s own purpose, rather than God the Father’s. The word for “sleep” is certainly different in 4:14 and 5:10, the verb used in the latter being that of 5:6-7. But the commentators I consulted are agreed that in 5:10 it is used in the sense of 4:14. And near the middle of this “second-coming section” is 4:17, “and so shall we ever be *with the Lord*.” True, 5:1ff move on to the subject of the day of the Lord. But the echo of 4:17 in 5:10 shows that the central theme of the whole unit concerns the Lord’s own purpose in dying, namely, to have us all *with Him* in resurrection life (cp. John 14:3). “Live” doesn’t just mean “be;” it denotes resurrection life. Now our life is hid with Him, though it is made good to us here on earth by the Spirit. But *then* in resurrection we shall all be completely with Him, including at His coming in glory.

This is the great truth that can be established from 1 Thessalonians 3:13 – He will come with all His saints. He will come “to be glorified in his saints and admired in *all* them that believe” (2 Thessalonians 1:10). If one saint “in Christ” were missed out on that glorious day, His glory would be spoiled. But how will saints currently asleep in terrestrial soil and saints still living on earth be able to accompany Him from heaven on that glorious day? 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 supplies the answer.

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.

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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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Behold I come quickly... surely I am coming quickly

(Revelation 22: 7, 20)

In a flash!
in the twinkling of an eye
we shall be changed,
we'll rise to meet Him in the sky.

And that shout!
We'll hear His voice when He appears,
fulfilling grace –
these favoured years.

They'll be raised up!
The dead in Christ shall first arise;
the Resurrection
and the Life shall fill their eyes!

We are alive!
Yes, waiting for our Saviour's voice,
to see the Lord,
and join these loved ones and rejoice.

We'll see His face,
and at the feet of Jesus fall;
and give Him praise,
our All in All.

No, not afraid!
Let's comfort others with this thought;
and looking heavenward,
we shall serve Him as we ought.

A thousand years!
is as a day – Oh, praise His Word,
He will not fail!
my living Lord.

Naomi L. Smith