

Scripture Truth

July – September 2007

How To Witness
Your South Land
Wrath is revealed
Being where the Lord is
The Rewriting of Man's History
A Look at Nehemiah for Today

SCRIPTURE TRUTH

Editor: Theo Balderston

SCRIPTURE TRUTH is published every three months to expound the teaching of the Scriptures so that we “may be thoroughly equipped for every good work”.

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Contents

Your South Land	1	A Look at Nehemiah for Today (Part 11) ...	20
The Rewriting of Man's History	5	Being where the Lord is	26
How to Witness	10	God and Relationships (book review)	28
Wrath is revealed	15	The Good Shepherd	Back Cover

Back in print, from the first editor of Scripture Truth:

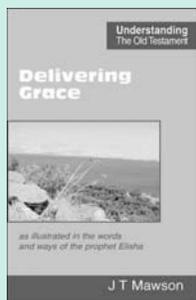
Delivering Grace

by J T Mawson

Hardback: R.R.P. £20.00 Readers' price: £14.95 plus p&p

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Elisha stands out as the prophet of grace, foreshadowing the Lord Jesus Christ in His present place on the throne of grace in heaven. In 192 pages, the author uses scenes from Elisha's experience to meditate on the later, and perfect, life of Jesus Christ, as he develops his theme of "the secret of spiritual victory, peace and joy".



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Your South Land

Donald Hill

God has given each believer a beautiful “south land.” What is it? Read on!

Namely, ...?

“Thou hast given me a south land”, Achsah said to her father, Caleb (Joshua 15:19, KJV; also Judges 1:15). Othniel had won Achsah as his bride by meeting Caleb’s challenge to smite Kirjath-sepher. Since the “promised land” had been divided amongst the tribes by lot, the “south land” was perhaps Achsah’s share of the inheritance. A south-facing property has the advantage of enjoying the warmth of the sun! According to a recent report, south-facing properties command a 5% premium (in the northern hemisphere!). People value “a south land.”

A God of grace and love has given each believer “a south land.” How much do you value it? Have you ever sat down quietly and meditated on your *temporal* blessings? Your *spiritual* blessings?

But good if we appreciate, not only the blessing to us, but also the cost to the Lord Jesus of our “south land.”

“Thine the cost, and thine the suffering,
Thine the cross and shame;
Ours the never-ending blessing
Through Thy precious name.”

Consider your temporal blessings

1. A comfortable home with adequate food, warmth and clothing.
2. All the modern conveniences that we take for granted:-
 - (a) Clean water piped into your home – you don’t have to trudge to the local well or river for your supply of water!
 - (b) Modern sanitation, baths and showering facilities.
 - (c) A washing machine or laundry facilities – you don’t have to go down to the river to wash clothes.
 - (d) Electric lighting of your home.
 - (e) A gas or electric cooker and probably a micro-wave. You don’t have to light a fire in the middle of a cramped, one-room house and enjoy all the smoke and unpleasantness.
3. Transport – either your own or as provided by others, allowing you to enjoy times of fellowship with those who love the Name of Jesus.
4. An open door, an open Bible and the liberty to gather together with fellow believers.

5. If you are young – educational opportunities through to higher education, enabling you to get a decent job. Think, by contrast, of what is available to young people in third-world countries.
6. If you are old – the care extended to you if you are in a care/nursing home and in the eventide of life.

This is the temporal “south land” that God has given you. You may have many other temporal blessings not enumerated above, and not shared by all believers in this country. Do you “enter into his gates with thanksgiving and into his courts with praise” (Psalm 100:4) on account of them?

Consider your spiritual blessings

“Blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3).

How much do these blessings mean to you?

1. Your sins are forgiven. A holy, righteous, sin-hating God can say of you, “Their sins and iniquities, will I remember no more” (Hebrews 10:17). They were remembered at Calvary and were all borne by the Lord Jesus.

“All thy sins were laid upon Him,
Jesus bore them on the tree.
God, who knew them, laid them on Him,
And, believing, thou art free.”

2. You have been “reconciled to God by the death of His Son.” See Romans 5:10 and 2 Corinthians 5:18-21. Once you were separated from a holy God by your sins and in a place of distance and darkness, but now the work of the Lord Jesus has brought you into a place of blessing and nearness.

“So nigh, so very nigh to God,
I could not nearer be;
For in the Person of His Son,
I am as near as He.”

3. You are amongst the justified of earth. You are cleared from every charge of sin and accepted before the Father’s face in all the value of the Person and work of the Lord Jesus. God is “just and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus” (Romans 3:26). You are:
 - (a) justified by faith and at peace with God (Romans 5:1). You are saved...through faith, which is the gift of God (Ephesians 2:8).
 - (b) justified by His blood and saved from wrath (Romans 5:9), even as God could say to the Israelite slaves, long before in Egypt, “When I see the blood, I will pass over you” (Exodus 12:13). Shortly, the wrath of God will be revealed from heaven and burst upon this guilty world, but the Lord

Jesus is “our deliverer from the coming wrath “ (1 Thessalonians 1:10, Darby Trans.).

- (c) “justified freely by His grace” (Romans 3:24, KJV). God’s free favour has reached the believer, who is “accepted in the beloved” (Ephesians 1:6). You are saved *by grace*, through faith, which is the gift of God (Ephesians 2:8). Grace is the capstone of our justification.

“A cloudless favour rests upon us here;
Thy face shines on us as it still doth shine
On Thy blest Son, whose image we shall bear.”

4. You are amongst the “saved of earth.” You have been saved from the *penalty* of sins through the work of the Lord Jesus at Calvary. You have been saved from the *power* of sin from day to day. You are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and have the power to say “No” to things that are wrong and “Yes” to things that are right. You will be saved from the *presence* of sin – when soon the Lord Jesus returns for His church and takes us to the Father’s house where there will be no sin, no tears, no pain and no death. All joy!
5. You belong to the company of the redeemed, having been bought at the costliest price in the universe – the precious blood of the Lord Jesus (1 Peter 1:18-19; Colossians 1:14).

“Thine only Son, Thy heart’s delight,
Far back, e’er time began,
Thou in Thy boundless love didst give
To die for ruined man.”

6. You have eternal life as a gift from God through Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 6:23), so that you know God. Speaking to His Father, the Lord Jesus said, “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou has sent” (John 17:3).

“Brought to rest within the circle
Where love’s treasures are displayed,
There we drink the living waters,
Taste the joys which never fade.”

7. The Father’s house is your eternal destiny, and a new body – a body of glory “like unto His glorious body” (Philippians 3:21). The Lord Jesus has not left us in the dark about this; for in John 14:1-3 He told His disciples about the Father’s house. And for them He prayed to His Father, “Father I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory” (John 17:24).



“The Father’s house, the Father’s heart,
All that the Son is given,
Made ours, the objects of His love,
And He our joy in heaven.”

*Christian,
do you
value
your
“south
land”?*

Christian, do you value your “south land”?

“Give me also springs of water.” (Joshua 15:19)

Whatever the sunlight and warmth did for the southern aspect of this land would have been useless without an adequate supply of water. In response to Achsah’s request, Caleb also gave her the upper and the nether springs. In a country dependent on “the early rain and the latter rain” (Deuteronomy 11:14, NKJV), and lacking Britain’s all-year precipitation, these springs would be life-saving.

As you value your “south land” in the light of all that is yours through the work of the Lord Jesus, there should be a response from your spirit to God, empowered by the Holy Spirit. He is our “upper Spring”! As “holy priests,” we are exhorted to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Christ Jesus (See 1 Peter 2:5-10). The psalmist said in his day, “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits” (Psalm 103:2, KJV). How much more, we in ours!

“Rise our hearts, and bless the Father,
Ceaseless song e’en here begun,
Endless praise and adoration
To the Father and the Son.”

As “royal priests,” and equally in the power of the Holy Spirit, we are exhorted to “set forth the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9, Darby Trans.). We are left in this world to be “nether springs,” refreshing the world below as ambassadors for Christ, as witnesses for Him. Whether in school, college, the work place or in retirement, the Lord Jesus would say to every believer, “Occupy [trade in my interests] until I come” (Luke 19:13, KJV).

“Jesus bids us shine with a clear pure light...
You in your small corner and I in mine.”

To sum up: May we “count our blessings, name them one by one”; and may there be a corresponding response from us toward God and toward man!

May we “count our blessings”

The Rewriting of Man's History

A study of Psalm 8 and 1 Timothy 3:16

Yannick Ford

Man-in-Adam has brought nothing but dishonour to God. God could have written mankind off because of this. Instead, He rewrote our history in the Lord Jesus and brings us into the benefit of the rewriting! This is a God-glorifying and under-emphasised aspect of the gospel.

“And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up in glory” (1 Timothy 3:16, NKJV).

What a marvellous verse! It encompasses the history of the Lord Jesus as the perfect, and now glorified Man, beginning with His incarnation – “God was manifested in the flesh” – and ending with His exaltation – “received up in glory.” We can only agree with the statement that this is a *great* mystery. Certain Bible translations use the word *piety* instead of godliness, and this emphasises the thought of godly behaviour, reverence towards God, etc. *Godliness / piety* is a quality equally applicable to man or woman. This is because the subject of 1 Timothy 3:16 is the mystery of the Lord Jesus taking on *manhood*. He was and is the only perfect Man. The Bible is quite clear that all other men and women have failed (Romans 3:23). We have all inherited a

sinful nature from Adam, and as such cannot be pleasing to God: “Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can it be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God” (Romans 8:7-8). God’s response to the flesh is condemnation, but the Lord Jesus Christ Himself bore that condemnation for us: “For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh” (Romans 8:3).

The Lord Jesus has, therefore, in a very real sense rewritten man’s history. Man has failed, but the Lord Jesus is the Second Man, the Last Adam (see 1 Corinthians 15:45-50). “Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.” Our flesh is finished with, as far as God is concerned. However our history does not end there, because we shall bear the image of the heavenly Man, the Lord Jesus (v.49). That is to say, the history of our flesh ends at the cross, but

The history of our flesh ends at the cross

Our history continues in the Lord Jesus

our history continues in the Lord Jesus. The apostle Paul therefore says, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

Therefore it will be profitable to consider the Lord Jesus as the perfect Man. We have a very real interest in this, because we are not seeing Him as an unattainable example, who simply magnifies the fact that our flesh is a dismal failure in God's sight. Instead, we see Him as the One who Himself has borne our condemnation and now lives in us, to produce *His* life in us. In other words, our two greatest problems have been completely taken up and solved by Him: (1) He has delivered us from the guilt of our sins, and (2) He provides the strength and ability that we completely lack to be pleasing to God.

Psalm 8, when seen in the light of New Testament revelation, demonstrates very clearly and wonderfully how the Lord Jesus has rewritten our history. This is because it moves seamlessly from man-in-Adam to the Man Christ Jesus, showing how He has regained all that Adam lost, and more.

Man-in-Adam

At first reading, what we see in this psalm is the honour in which God placed man, and yet his littleness in the face of all of God's creation; and then

the wonder that God should concern Himself about man. "When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained, what is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him?" (v.4). Truly, we realise our smallness when we see the works of God – in particular the heavens, represented in this psalm by the moon and stars. However, although man *is* small compared to the grandeur of God's universe, he nevertheless has a unique position, with a possibility of responding to God and having fellowship with Him. Originally man had been placed in a position of authority over the earth and its creation (see Genesis 1:26-28). Therefore the psalmist says that whereas man has been "made a little lower than the angels", nevertheless he has been "crowned with glory and honour", and given "dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen – even the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea that pass through the paths of the seas" (vv.6-8). In this position of dominion, man was to be on earth for God's glory, to represent Him. Thus the psalm begins and ends with "O LORD, our Lord, how excellent is Your name in all the earth!"

But all of this has been lost to man because of Adam's sin. Man is still made in the image of God, but he is spiritually dead, and so he cannot glorify God. The pres-

The LORD was sorry that He had made man

ence and the activities of man in the flesh upon this earth do not contribute to God's glory. Thus a contemplation of man-in-Adam does *not* cause one to say "O LORD, our Lord, how excellent is Your name in all the earth!", but rather, as in Genesis 6:5-7, "Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. So the LORD said, 'I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.'" Psalm 8:6-8 speaks of man's dominion over creation, but since Adam's fall things are not as they were initially. Genesis 3:17b-19 tells us instead, "Cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat from it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field. In the

sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return." Whereas man should have had all the animal creation under his control, yet we read in the Bible of "evil beasts" (e.g. see Leviticus 26:6). Truly, the wonderful thoughts contained in Psalm 8 can only now be applied to man in a very limited, partial sense.

The Second Man

However, we only have to turn to the New Testament to see that the thoughts expressed in this psalm are fulfilled in the Lord Jesus:

"For He has not put the world to come, of which we speak, in subjection to angels. But one testified in a certain place, saying: 'What is man that You are mindful of him, or the son of man that You take care of him? You made him a little lower than the angels; You crowned him with glory and honour, and set him over the works of Your hands. You have put all things in subjection under his feet.' For in that He put all in subjection under him, He left nothing that is not put under him. But now we do not yet see all things put under him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honour, that He, by the



“We see Jesus”, who gloriously succeeds where man failed

grace of God, might taste death for everyone. For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the author of their salvation perfect through sufferings”

(Hebrews 2:5-10).

Whereas we have been considering man-in-Adam in the initial glory of his creation, and the sadness and loss of his fall, now “we see Jesus”, who gloriously succeeds where man failed. And the wonder of it is that He succeeds for God and His glory, and *for us!* Man was created “a little lower than the angels,” but when we consider the Lord Jesus, who is the Son of God, He was *made* a little lower than the angels when He came in voluntary humiliation as a Man, for the sake of suffering unto death. Because of this, God has been glorified, we can be righteously forgiven, and once again we can say “O LORD, our Lord, how excellent is Your name in all the earth!” Thus it is fitting that Jesus has been “crowned with glory and honour”, which, as the passage in Hebrews 2 shows us, is the true fulfilment of Psalm 8:5.

Note however that the *public display* of the Lord Jesus as the honoured, glorified Man, who will be in authority over all of God's creation, is yet to be. Right now “we do not yet see all things put under Him.” It is “the world to come” that will be in public subjection to Him. Note,

too, that we shall be with Him in His glory: “For it became Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings” (Hebrews 2:10, KJV). Truly, the Lord Jesus is the “Captain of our salvation”! He has become the blessed fulfilment of Psalm 8, and He associates us in the glorious results and victories of His work. We come into the benefit of Psalm 69:4: “then I restored that which I took not away” (KJV). I like Young's literal translation of this verse: “That which I took not away – I bring back.”

The Lord Jesus Himself quoted part of verse 2 of Psalm 8. “And Jesus said to them, “Yes. Have you never read, ‘Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have perfected praise?’” (Matthew 21:16, NKJV) The religious leaders of the day displayed implacable hatred towards the Lord Jesus. They were furious that they could not deny the “wonderful things that He did,” and that the children praised Him as the Son of David. The children, with no preconceived ideas or prejudices against the Lord Jesus, saw how He was and what He did, and praised Him accordingly. When a child gives a simple, honest testimony, it is difficult to contradict it, and it puts to shame those adults who try to manipulate a situation or twist the truth.

Psalm 8 begins and ends with the same words: "O LORD, our Lord, how excellent *is* Your name in all the earth." We have seen how man was created in the image of God and should have glorified Him on the earth, but instead sin and failure came in. But we have also seen how the Lord Jesus has more than

restored what we lost, in such manner that God *is* now glorified in man, because of Jesus, the heavenly Man! Thus it is fitting that we have the same words both to open and to close this Psalm – for all it says to the glory of God has been safeguarded and fulfilled by the Lord Jesus!

New from Scripture Truth Publications:

The Gospel in Job

by Yannick Ford

Hardback: R.R.P. £17.25 Readers' price: £12.95 plus p&p

Paperback: R.R.P. £6.00 Readers' price: £5.99 plus p&p

Previously published in "Scripture Truth", the complete series is now available as both hardback and paperback books.



One of the purposes of this commentary on Job is to show how, all through the Bible, there is one message of salvation, and how we can enter into a relationship of peace and joy with God through the work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

A second objective is to show how the lessons that Job learned can teach us not to rely on ourselves, but to trust in the Lord Jesus who has not only forgiven our sins, but has also dealt with our sinful nature and gives us the power to live a life that is pleasing to Him.

In its 112 pages, Yannick takes up the points made by Job and his friends in their long series of speeches, and shows how these can be understood in the light of the Bible as a whole.

How to...

Part 4: How to Witness

Douglas Pettman

Witness is about our Lord Himself and then about His death and resurrection because He is the One who died and rose. This heartwarming article should re-incentivise our witness. It originated as a talk on on the Truth for Today programme for London's Premier Radio (www.truthfortoday.org.uk).

Four starving lepers, huddling outside the walls of a besieged city, exhibit the essentials of “how to witness.” In desperation, and believing that they would die whatever they did, they had decided to cross to the camp of the besieging army. To their amazement, the camp was eerily deserted! They were able to eat and drink all that starving men could. But then a thought struck them. “We do not well: this is a day of good tidings and we hold our peace,” they said to each other (2 Kings 7:9 KJV). They re-crossed no-man’s land to the gates of their own city – Samaria – and told the incredulous, starving people inside of their extraordinary discovery. Sceptically and cautiously, the people of Samaria tested their story and found it exactly true. Then followed a stampede for the goodies in the abandoned enemy camp.

*We do not
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This incident encapsulates what a witness is – someone who can give an assurance, through personal knowledge, regarding the facts of a matter. The Biblical sense, as demonstrated by these lepers, adds to this ordinary sense the idea of personal involvement in the importance of the matter witnessed to, and eagerness that those hearing it should accept it. In Acts 2:32 we see Peter exemplifying this, on behalf of all the apostles: “This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses.” The apostles had seen the Lord Jesus alive. This triumphant event was worth witnessing to, even in dangerous circumstances. But what of ourselves who did not see Christ risen with our own eyes? In 1 John 5:10 the apostle tells his readers, “He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself.” That

is, we are assured of the great fact of the work of the Lord Jesus in our own lives. The Holy Spirit confirms it all to us and we can proceed to witness to the truth of it.

However, each of us is different in our characteristics and abilities. We do not fit into a “witnessing pattern” governed by one rigid list of rules. On the other hand, though there are many forms in which to witness, the underlying principles will be the same. This article seeks to identify these from the Scriptures.

The Subject of witness

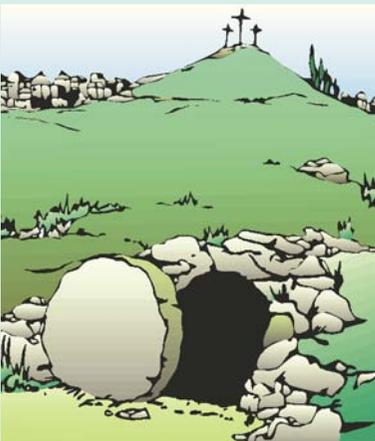
How many striking reminiscences the apostles could have given of the three years they had spent with the Lord! Think of all the people fed with bread and fish, or the manner of Lazarus' coming out of his tomb and resuming his life after rising from the dead, or of all those encounters with the scribes and Pharisees! If they had borne witness to these striking memories, they would have missed the message. *Christ was the message!* In John 5:39 Jesus said, "Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of ME." Referring to the work of the Holy Spirit, the Lord said, "He shall testify of ME: and ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with Me from the beginning" (John 15:26,27). Before He was taken back to heaven, the Lord told His disciples; "Ye shall be witnesses unto ME" (Acts 1:8). Here is the first principle: we must witness to our knowledge of the Person of the Lord Himself and not just to His striking actions or teaching *without referring to His Person*. As Christians, we have learned that salvation was provided by the work of the Lord Jesus alone; *He* gives value to His work on the cross, and it is vital that we *always* direct our testimony to Him.

*Christ
was
the
message!*

The Scriptural guidance for "witnessing" goes further. The apostles did not dwell on the history of His many acts, but linked witness to His Person with witness to His greatest work: His death and resurrection. Listen to Peter's first sermon: "Him, [Jesus], being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that He should be holden of it" (Acts 2:23,24). "This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses" (v.32; similarly in 4:10; 5:30-32; 10:39-40). The subject of the death and

resurrection of the Lord Jesus dominated all the apostles had to say because it is the key to salvation.

Similarly with Paul (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). "I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received ... by which also ye are saved ... 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." Paul regarded this as vital, powerful truth that leads men to salvation. He points out in that chapter (verse 14) that without the resurrection our faith is "vain",



that is, absolutely empty. So the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus are vital elements of all true witness.

Why not try, quietly, to sit and think of the Lord? Perhaps a picture will come into your mind of three crosses and the One on the centre cross; you will think of the raised, malicious, voices, but also of the words of one of the robbers crucified with Him, “this man hath done nothing amiss” (Luke 23:41). Then think forward to the first day of the week. See the great stirring of the early hours, when the women first found the tomb empty (Matthew 28:1-6). Think through the events of that long day, until the two returned from Emmaus with the news that they had seen the Lord. Think then of how the Lord Himself suddenly stood in their midst! (Luke 24:35-6) To these memory-pictures of Christ we can add our witness. The same Lord Himself has saved us. We confirm from our own experience of Him the great biblical witness to Himself, first, and then to His death and resurrection, which have so affected millions of lives.

The purpose of witness

Witness is surely wasted without a purpose directing it. The account, in John chapter 9, of the man born blind and healed by the Lord illustrates the principle of witness with a purpose. Have you noticed that, at each stage in the story, the man seems to be drawn nearer to understanding who Jesus was? Eventually, as he stubbornly insisted on giving Jesus the credit for his cure, the Pharisees put him out of the synagogue, and into social isolation (v.34). It was after this act that Jesus met him again and asked him if he believed on the Son of God. Having heard regarding the identity of this Person from the Lord Jesus directly, the man said, “Lord, I believe. And he worshipped Him” (v.38). This is the point of witness: to bring people to believe in, and to worship, the Lord Jesus for themselves. Christian groups and churches should never be merely places of social gathering. They should be places where the Lord Jesus is the centre of belief, *witness*, and worship and where we rejoice with

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one another, with Him as our centre.

The power of witness

The Lord Jesus promised His disciples that when He left them, they would have “another Comforter” [that is, One from God as the Lord Himself was], “that He may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him: but ye know Him; for He dwelleth with you and shall be in you” (John 14:16-17). This promise is made good to every real and dependent believer in the Lord Jesus. It had a direct bearing on the witness of the early apostles. First, it was after they themselves were “filled with the Holy Ghost,” that Peter spoke to the crowds in Jerusalem about the death and res-

urrection of the Lord Jesus (Acts 2:4, 14ff). Secondly, the power of the Holy Spirit is also seen in the effects of Peter's witness. "They were pricked in their heart, and said ... what shall we do"? (v.37) Peter's witness had been to the Person, the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit, and three thousand were saved that day.

Since every true believer has been given the permanent presence of the Holy Spirit to help and encourage him or her (Ephesians 1:13), perhaps we wonder why we do not see this same power and effects at work today? The power is still there! However, among many other reasons, such as the matter of our own devotedness to the Lord, let us also understand that there is a god of this world who "hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them" (2 Corinthians 4:4). Satan is active today, perhaps as never before, filling minds with material interests and turning men's minds from following God. But may this never prevent the true witness from going forth to our Saviour, who has died and risen again so that the Gospel might be known!

*The
power
is
still
there!*

Vocal Witness

We now consider the variety of forms of witness. Firstly, and most obviously, it can be *vocal*. Four words in Acts describe the variety of vocal witness. When persecution forced many believers to leave Jerusalem for other places, some of them reached Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, "preaching the word" (11:19). However "preach" here is better translated as "spoke," and denotes the simple speech of travelling people. We could just say they were "gossiping the Gospel" as they went. How wonderful that, when Spirit-filled believers are scattered, they scatter the truth of the word of God too!

However, the next verse says that those who reached Antioch "spoke unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus." This word for "preaching" means literally "announcing" or "evangelising." This was the first time non-Jews had been evangelised! They should still be evangelised today!

Then, in verse 23 we have yet another word. When Barnabas came, he "was glad and exhorted them." Here is the servant of the Lord, exhorting new believers to continue to follow the Lord Jesus and the new path of blessing. A fourth word appears in verse 26. Barnabas fetched Paul from Tarsus to Antioch and they both "taught." Their effort here was, in a strictly orderly way, to communicate the truths concerning the Lord Jesus and His purpose for believers.

What varied means of vocal witness were maintained and directed by the Holy Spirit! Every one can have a part somewhere in this work.

A living witness

Perhaps you find it difficult to speak. Then consider Lazarus, the friend of Jesus who had died and whom the Lord brought back to life (John 11). Subsequently, when the Lord Jesus was present at a meal in the house of Lazarus and his two sisters, Lazarus was a centre of attention after the Lord Himself (John 12:9). Note, he did not say one word which is recorded. What was observable, however, was that Lazarus was alive, sitting at table with the Lord, and listening to His every word. Lazarus being there at all was a witness. Because of him, “many ... believed on Jesus,” so much so, that his own life was in danger again (vv. 10, 11). The personal, silent, living witness of a child of God is often more valuable than many words. Paul, writing to the Corinthians, tells them, “Ye are our epistle ... known and read of all men” (2 Corinthians 3:2). Do others mark your life as a living witness for the Lord?

Witness in action

Giving thanks for the believers in Thessalonica, Paul says, “Ye became our imitators, and of the Lord ... so that ye became models to all that believe in Macedonia and in Achaia: for the word of the Lord sounded out from you...in every place your faith which is towards God has gone abroad” (1 Thessalonians 1:6-8, Darby translation). What a wide testimony to the power of the Lord Jesus to save was given by the actions of these people!

The quality of witness

One of the great failures in the church of God in our day is the lack of love for one another. Love is active. Love never fails, Paul tells us (1 Corinthians 13:8). The Lord said, “By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:35 KJV). What a powerful witness to all around is the display of love for one another, because we love God. This is to be shown in various ways, for instance in the offer of hospitality (1 Peter 4:9; Hebrews 13:2).

As we reflect on our witness for the Lord, let the words Paul wrote to Timothy be true of us: “Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses” (1 Timothy 6:12). Max Lucardo wrote, in reference to Colossians 1:28, 29, “Look at Paul’s aim, to present everyone perfect in Christ. Was it easier then than now? I don’t think so. Paul called it work. ‘To this end I labour,’ he wrote. Labour means work. Work means homes visited, people taught, classes prepared. What was his source of strength? He worked with all the Lord’s ‘energy which so powerfully works in me’ (NIV). As Paul worked, so did God. And as you work, so does the Father.” May ours be a “good confession” in whatever way the Holy Spirit gives us opportunity.

Wrath is revealed

Romans 1:18 – 2:3

Theo Balderston

A sombre subject – but necessary today. In what way is the wrath of God already revealed? And why?

Wrath and atheism

No sooner has Paul started his great exposition of the righteousness of God as the heart of the gospel (Romans 1:17), than he diverts to the subject of the wrath of God (1:18ff). He does not resume his account of the righteousness of God for two chapters (3:21). Romans 1:18 starts with a “for.” This means that, in order to understand why the gospel centres on the *righteousness* of God, we must first recognise the reality and rightness of His wrath. For the most part

*God’s
wrath is the
expression
of His holy
nature
against sin*

human anger is unholy. But God’s wrath is the expression of His holy nature against sin. There is a “wrath to come” (1 Thessalonians 1:10; Luke 3:7, NKJV). The infinite holiness of God entails the everlasting punishment of sin. None was more clear on this truth than the Lord Himself (Matthew 18:8; Mark 9:48). But Paul writes here about a wrath *already* revealed. People think that there is no evidence in the world today of God’s coming judgment of sin (Psalm 10:3-7, 11; 50:21). There is.

Wrath is revealed in the things to which God has abandoned the human race, because of its refusal of the clear witness which creation gives to Himself (Romans 1:18-23). Human reasoning and science pervert the plain witness of creation which shows a far greater Hand than itself. Nature’s “laws of motion” imply a Creator of these laws, who therefore is Himself not bound by them. Its time-boundness implies One not so bound, but eternal, who created time. This is perfectly obvious (1:20), or, rather, it would be, if the underlying agenda of the “scientific project” were not to find explanations of natural phenomena that dispense with the need to invoke God as their Cause. “I have no need of that hypothesis” is said to have been the reply of the mathematician Laplace when Napoleon asked him whether there was any place for God in his theory of celestial mechanics. Certainly, God’s creation is based on marvellous mathematics and systems that themselves witness to an infinite Mind behind them. Certainly, God has graciously allowed even those

*Creation
shows a far
greater
Hand than
itself*

who refuse His witness in creation to find many amazing truths about it. And, certainly, there are godly scientists who do see the greatness of God in what they know and discover. But not many. For most, scientific research must be carried out on the assumption that God is *not* there.

This being so, it is not in the least surprising that they think that their assumption works. Human beings are clever; if they search long enough and hard enough, a “story” of the origins of things that suits their prescriptions *will occur* to them. That doesn’t make the story right. And as the “story” they have devised could not lead them up to God, so it has led their thoughts downward. “Professing to be wise, they became fools,” who worshipped the creature rather than the Creator. Since they have ruled God out, they worship themselves – human beings cannot worship *nothing*, despite their claims (1:22-23, 25).

Therefore the dominant religion of the West today is humanity worshipping itself, its own reason, its moral standards and values – which it idolises as human creations – and its own feats and achievements, whether intellectual, scientific, medical, cultural or sporting. Having excluded God, it denies the truth that man was made to please and glorify God, and substitutes man pleasing *himself* as mankind’s highest purpose. This is the governing moral philosophy; social policy is based on making this possible for the largest number of people. An educational philosophy, even a philanthropy, that must

be totally “non-judgmental” is as much governed by this enthronement of what pleases man as the most unrestrained pleasure-seeking. It is entirely un-difficult to see the direct line that leads *from* the exalting of what pleases the human heart as the moral ultimate *to* the unleashing of “uncleanness in the lusts of their hearts” (1:24), and to the prevalence of the practices of vv.26-31. Of these, the sins of vv.26-27 come first. Of the many ugly ways in which the rejection of the living God in favour of a dead self-idolatry disfigures the human race, the depravity of vv.26-27 is also the clearest defiance of God as the Creator of humanity, in its disregard for the most fundamental aspect of this – that He created human beings as men and women for relationship with each other (Genesis 1:27). It brings its own natural penalty (Romans 1:27).

God gave them up

However, these things are not just the inevitable outcome of a human rejection of God. *God Himself has allowed them to happen* as a partial withdrawal of His providential, restraining control of humanity. “God gave them up” (vv.24, 28). That is to say: God has removed the restraint from the lusts of the human heart to let the practices and sins that result from their denial of Him multiply *now*, and make more evident the rightness of, and need for, His wrath against idolaters in the judgment to come. This will happen more completely in time to come when “that which / He who restrains” is “taken out of the way”. How terrible for those “given up” by God in

that day! They will no longer have an opportunity for repentance (2 Thessalonians 2:6-7, 10-12). But in *this* day, the “wrath is revealed” to convict and bring to repentance. This happened to us. Paul writes, in a very similar context, to the Corinthians, “And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified...” (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). Hallelujah! God loved us whilst we were still sinners (Romans 5:8). In regard to everyone enslaved by

*And such
were some
of you.
But you
are washed*

the sins of 1:26-31, we should have the heart of God who is “not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

A world that condones wrongdoing

But there is a worse stage than simply these vices occurring: namely, the world’s approval of them (Romans 1:32). The connection between such approval and denial of the Creator is most evident as regards the sin of vv.26-7. Here man’s approval involves a claim to be in charge of right and wrong. It is *because* society has deliberately exalted man in order to dethrone the living God, that it has treated the divinely ordered relationship between men and women as “shackles”, and centred its rejection of His creatorial authority on endowing what degrades men and women with special legal protection.

*Mankind
has asserted
its claim
to write
its own
morality*

Mankind has asserted its claim to write its own morality – even if many clauses of the human rights charter express fine aspirations – and regards this as its noblest achievement. It apes its evil prince, who “set [his] heart as the heart of God” (Ezekiel 28:6 AV; John 12:31; Genesis 3:1). Thus Romans 1:25, 32 are truer of our time than of Paul’s own.

Contrariwise the vices listed in vv.28-31 receive a less open, more ashamed, often uneasy, approval. In some cases this approval is merely in actions: a world which is against murder and even the death penalty gorges itself on murder and violence in its entertainments. Immorality, because it is wrong, is sniggeringly approved of. Covetousness is uneasily approved. The “free-market” revolution of the 1980s said that “greed is good.” People feel that they cannot deny that greed (“profit-seeking,” etc) is what has brought the world prosperity. And so with “boastfulness” (self-assertiveness now being a virtue). Lie-telling is lightly regarded, and “invention of evil things” – when more than now? Few will openly defend obedience to parents. Lack of natural affection (so, KJV; “unloving,” NKJV; perhaps “hardhearted”) is seen in the justification of divorce despite the hurt to the children. And true mercy is little

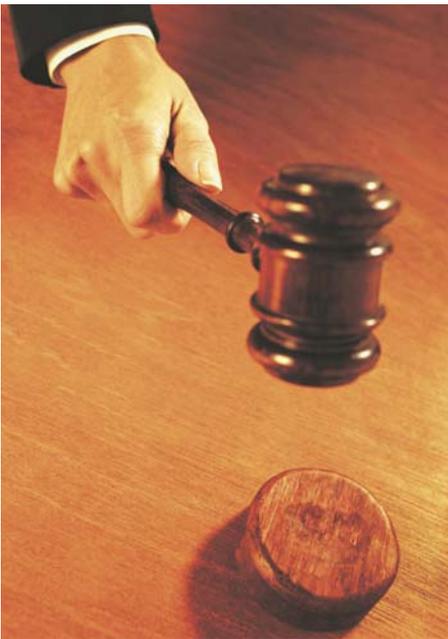
known. Lenient rules that find reasons why people are not to blame, as well as regard for prisoners' rights, are indeed quite widespread. But mercy is different: it presupposes *wrongs* acknowledged by both parties. But a world which has lost the sense of sin loses the softening experience of mercy too.

Of course, not everyone condones this catalogue of sins. Many in Paul's day would have agreed with him that they showed the rightness of the wrath of God. As regards 1:26-27, even now this moral sense survives in non-western societies, including those outside the so-called "Judaean-Christian" orbit. This is because God inscribed in every human heart the moral sense of these things being "contrary to nature" (v.26; cp. 2:14-15). However in "the west", we have reached a time, worse than Paul's

own, when the prevalence of these things no longer makes people agree that God's wrath in regard to them is *right*. Today these verses are a challenge as never before to *Christians*: do we acknowledge things to be right or wrong because *God* says them to be right or wrong, or only when *man* says it? Without the former we can never truly see the sinfulness of sin. Verse 18 can also be read as "...who hold the truth in unrighteousness." Some claim to be Christians yet justify what God condemns as sin. They, too, have "changed the glory of the incorruptible God for the likeness of an image of corruptible man." Isaiah had some trenchant words about such (Isaiah 5:20).

What about the smug?

So does acknowledgement of God's standards of right and wrong exempt us from the wrath of God? Not at all. "In whatever you judge another," says Paul, "you condemn yourself" (Romans 2:1). You have in your own heart the same revolting tendencies as those you condemn; and your own behaviour displays, in some aspect or other, the same sins. Therefore, by the fact that you think it right to condemn others, you admit that God is right to judge *you*. You think that you will escape because you condemn sinners, and that your prosperity is a sign of God's approval? These benefits are in fact His goodness and forbearance designed to draw you by gratitude to repentance (2:3-5). God's judgment is according to absolute and inviolable standards; the unrighteous, the self-righteous, those who justify sin and



those who condemn it – all alike will be judged by a single divine standard, that approves patient well-doing, and condemns sinful deeds. Gentiles, no less than Jews, have God’s right standards within their reach, because God wrote them on the hearts of men long before Sinai. Jews who practise double standards will not be judged more leniently because they belong to God’s chosen people (2:12-29). Thus Paul demon-

strates his vital point: that God is God; His standards are absolute, and His wrath against sin is *right*.

*God is God;
His
standards
are absolute*

In Romans 3:9-20, 23 Paul winds the matter up. Whether you or I think that we, or

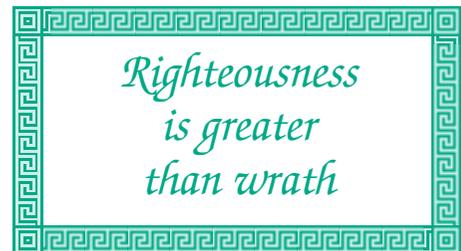
others, sin; or that this, or that, is, or is not, sin, is irrelevant. What *God* has said is what matters. Only a holy God can pronounce what is and what is not, sin. And so Paul concludes by leaving his appeal even to God-given moral sense behind (i.e. 1:18 – 2:29), in order to “rest his case” on what God *says* in the Bible. He cites a selection of Old-Testament texts showing clearly that *all have sinned*.

The righteousness of God

It is only by realising that the wrath of God is *right* that we perceive the need for the *righteousness* of God to be displayed in salvation. This is a great, fundamental and enlarging discovery. Only because God acted in *supreme*



righteousness in the cross can it bring free salvation. In the cross, Christ perfectly propitiated the wrath of God against sin. Because God totally condemned sin in the death of Christ, He can righteously call the sinner righteous who simply sides with God against himself by believing that Jesus died for him (3:21-26). Therefore righteousness is greater than wrath; and “the ministry of righteousness” has greater glory than “the ministry of condemnation” (2 Corinthians 3:9). Hallelujah!



A Look at Nehemiah for Today

Part 12: A new beginning (Chapters 10 & 11)

Ted Murray

Nehemiah 10 and 11 are all about people living for God. It wasn't easy for them; it isn't easy for us. They knew they had to. Do we?

People for God

Nehemiah 10 describes a re-dedication – not of walls (this didn't come until 12:27-43) – but of *people*. Nehemiah 11 describes a freewill offering of *people*.

Hard work (chapters 3-7), hearing God's word (chapter 8), and repentance and prayer (chapter 9) roughly describe the sequence of events in Nehemiah up to the start of chapter 10. By the beginning of chapter 10, the people's consciences had been awakened by the good hand of God upon them in the rebuilding of the walls and the re-establishing of order in city and temple. Re-acquainting themselves with God's word, they had repented, and heard the Levites' prayer, reminding them of what God had done for them throughout their history. That prayer had ended with

What a contrast to our day, when those in government have disregarded any "form of godliness"

an undertaking to make a covenant of re-dedication to God. The first twenty-seven verses of chapter 10 list the names of those who "sealed the document". These comprised the governor, twenty-two priests, seventeen Levites, and forty-four leaders of the people. What a picture of a nation, small though it was, whose government, religious leaders and heads of families all vowed to walk in faith before the Lord! What a contrast to our day,

when those in government have disregarded any "form of godliness", embraced secularism and all that goes with it, promoted homosexuality, and legislated against the conscience of those who wish to be governed by Scripture. Even some so-called leaders in the churches disregard the teaching of Scripture and condone evil practice.

True, the scene depicted in this chapter was a very poor second to the glorious conditions and assemblies of the days of David and Solomon. This was only "a measure of revival in our bondage" (Ezra 9:8, NKJV). Small and weak, at best, and under the domination of a world power, nevertheless this remnant, because of their repentance regarding their nation's sins and their total reliance on God, were wonderfully blest. This should encourage us. God does not restore that which once flourished to its pristine glory; but, instead of bemoaning "the day of small things" (Zechariah 4:10), we should in faith accept the situation we find ourselves in, repent and re-dedicate ourselves: this is the way of blessing. In a day of breakdown, when men are

no longer prepared to accept the authority of Scripture regarding relationships between male and female, and many follow them, we need to examine ourselves and follow Nehemiah's compatriots' steps of re-dedication. They realised the value of God's word and acted upon it, even at the cost, subsequently, of bitter sorrow and humiliation. This needs to be done today.

Those leaders who placed their seals on the covenant of re-dedication were then joined by the rest of the people in placing themselves under its terms (Nehemiah 10:29). Though drawn from all walks of life, they all did this with knowledge and understanding of the implications. There were no "free-riders". To live a life for Christ in this present world needs similar action. There is the need for knowledge of the Scriptures, an understanding of them, and a life of dedication to live by them. But, unlike the people of Nehemiah's day, born-again believers of our day are indwelt by the Holy Spirit who enables them to live a life which is pleasurable to God. Verse 29 also indicates the value of *fellowship* and its power to strengthen commitment to the requirements of this re-dedication: "They joined with their brethren."

Comprehensive re-dedication

Their covenant of re-dedication had five definite clauses:

- 1) To walk in God's law.
- 2) To maintain separation from the peoples of the land.
- 3) To observe the Sabbath and to let the land lie fallow.
- 4) To deal graciously with their brethren.
- 5) To do what was needed to maintain the regular temple service.

Brought into New-Testament terms, these five clauses present a great code for Christian living:

- 1) God's Word must have its rightful place of authority in our lives day by day.
- 2) We must walk a path of separation – from the world, but to the Lord, avoiding an "unequal yoke with unbelievers" (2 Corinthians 6:14).
- 3) We should set aside the Lord's day as a special day; and recognise our responsibility for the good things God has committed to us.
- 4) We should care for our fellow believers.
- 5) We should recognize our regular responsibility in the maintenance of the testimony of God.

This is a very comprehensive covenant; it covered every part of the lives of the returned exiles, and every day of the week too. Its first clause, indeed, committed them to obedience to the Word of God *in its entirety* (v.29). And our dedication to the Lord and His Word must be similarly comprehensive. Do we "cherry pick" – do we accept the Scriptures that suit our lifestyle and wilfully ignore the rest? Too often

*Do we “cherry pick” –
do we accept
the Scriptures that
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and wilfully
ignore the rest?*

Re-dedication in detail

The second clause of this covenant indicates a twofold responsibility – for ourselves, and also for our families (Nehemiah 10:30). Designed to ensure that no foreign influence entered the family, its counterpart for us is given by Paul in 2 Corinthians 6:14-18. Are we, as parents and even grandparents, making sure that the influence of the world is not entering our households? Sad to say, there is a lot of failure on this score. Its effects are evident in the behaviour, dress mode and demeanour of many families in the church today. It often shows itself in a lack of reverence at formal worship gatherings – in casual attitudes and disrespectful clothing. We meet with our Lord, the most wonderful Being in our lives and what do we do? Before and immediately after the meeting there is chatter about what took place during the week, how the football team fared and many other mundane things. It is sad to say that, in some cases, our dress sense does not befit the occasion. Should we be invited to meet the Queen or some other dignitary, we would dress for the occasion; yet we, His purchased possession, allow the casualness that marks the age in which we live to colour our dress, behaviour and demeanour. As gathering to the Lord’s Name, and claiming His presence in the midst, we ought to sense His greatness and the glory of His person in a spirit of reverence and awe, and feel the privilege of being in His presence. When the priests entered the temple, they took off their everyday garments and put on the priestly



*The principle of
keeping one day of the
week different is well
worth carrying out*

allow greed for material gain, family commitments, holiday travel and other tasks to come before the request of the Lord to remember Him? Sadly, there are some believers who practise attending once a week, *so that* the things of everyday life can otherwise carry on undisturbed. In His wisdom God gave the instruction to the Jews to “remember the Sabbath to keep it holy” (Exodus 20:8). The principle of keeping one day of the week different from the remainder is well worth carrying out. To give just a day – one out of seven – to be occupied with the Lord’s Person, work and worth has given spiritual as well as physical refreshment to the church since Pentecost. The first lines of poetry that Frances Ridley Havergal wrote were:

I gave My life for thee,
My precious blood I shed,
That thou might’st ransomed be
And quickened from the dead;
I gave My life for thee,
What hast thou given for Me?

To this they annexed a vow to “forgo the seventh year’s produce” (cp. Exodus 23:10-12). This challenges our faith. It represented a great step of faith for these Jews, with all the uncertainty of the enemies around them. As we look to the uncertain future of our assemblies, what part does our faith play? Do we rely on human ability and material wealth to keep the testimony in our area going, or do we totally rely on the Lord? Sometimes “living by faith” is viewed as a sort of special calling for some of God’s servants. Here the whole congregation signed up to this undertaking and in this, the church’s day, all believers are called upon to live by faith and not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7). We tend to think that if everything is in order to *our* satisfaction, this does duty for dependence on the Lord. We may check that we are gathering on what has been termed “divine ground,” and that our gatherings are outwardly and ecclesiastically correct, sometimes putting up false barriers to reception to achieve this; yet lose our hold on the eternal realities.

The final part of this third clause pledged them to cancel debts every seventh year (Nehemiah 10:31; cp. Deuteronomy 15:2). Do we sometimes exact hard and self-righteous demands of one another, alienating those whom we ought to have drawn

with cords of love, and causing unnecessary distress to our fellow believers? Concerning the famished crowds whom the disciples wished to send away, the Lord said, “You give them something to eat” (Matthew 14:16). It is our responsibility to care for and feed the flock of God, and pay heed to the Lord’s command not to send them away. We can see the chaos in the assembly that has been caused by division and schism, due to the exaction of harsh demands by some on their fellow believers. Our Lord’s “new commandment” (John 13:34-35) has flown out of the door and self righteousness has entered; demands for apology have been required instead of acts of reconciliation. Looking back, we must all say (even the best of us) that we are a poor witness. As the “day of grace” draws to a close, and, sadly, the word of God is being given up in parts of the church, surely those who seek to cling to the Word should cease exactions of another. Rather, all alike judging everything that has hindered fellowship, we should put away the evil things that have wrought havoc, and stand together in fellowship with each other, and in testimony to the world that we belong to the Lord.

By the fourth clause of their covenant the people of Nehemiah’s day undertook to do what was needed to maintain the regular worship in the temple. This also involved the whole congregation – priests, Levites and the people. Some had the task of collecting wood for the burnt offerings; others of attending to the ordinances respecting first-fruits. Whatever the task, it was to be done willingly. It was only with regard to money that an obligation was placed on the whole community. They were to pay an annual tax of one-third of a shekel “for the service of the house of our God” (Nehemiah 10:32ff). A silver shekel, weighing 0.364 troy oz, is, at today’s value of silver, approximately £5.00. The requirements for the service of the house of God did not demand great sums of money but a small offering was required. In

*Godliness
opens
hearts and
wallets*

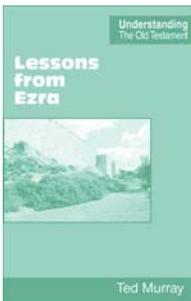
the time of Christ the temple tax was the equivalent of two days’ wages (cp. Matthew 17:27). Today there are many needs in connection with the service of God: running expenses of buildings, maintenance of His servants at home and abroad; support of literature – the list is endless. We are not under any obligation as to how much we give to the work of the Lord, but the Scriptures remind us, “So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver”

(2 Corinthians 9:7). If the people of God are right individually, then what is corporate will flourish, and there will be abundant provision to maintain a visible testimony. Lack of spirituality closes up hearts and wallets; whereas godliness opens both. May we, like the people of Nehemiah’s day, be determined not to neglect this.

A human freewill offering

Chapter 11 appears to consist mainly of a list of names, whose meanings shall not be more closely studied in this instance. But verses 1-2 contain a further lesson.

They detail another free will offering, not of possessions, but of men willing to serve God in Jerusalem. The city defences needed to be maintained and manned, the temple had to function as the place of worship, good government had to be done. To fulfil these tasks, people had to live in Jerusalem. The leaders of the people resided there; but for the rest of its population, lots were cast so that ten percent of the returned exiles occupied the city. Yet those on whom lots fell were described as volunteers whom the rest of the people blessed! It is sad when the majority in an assembly give no thought to the few “volunteers” on whom the burden of maintenance of meeting rooms falls. The volunteers for “Jerusalem service” came from every section of society. There were ordinary tribesmen (vv.4-9), priests (vv.10-14), Levites (vv.15-18), and Nethinim who resided in Ophel, a part of Jerusalem almost adjacent to the Temple (v.21). They didn’t have far to travel to get to their place of service for the Lord! Let us, in our day, by the grace of God, follow the example of these volunteers in our walk, worship, praise and testimony, and occupy a place where Christ is rightfully exalted at the centre of the gathering.



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Being where the Lord is

“But the boat was now in the middle of the sea, tossed by the waves, for the wind was contrary... And He said, ‘Come’” (Matthew 14:24-29).

Today also, the wind is much against Christians trying to “walk by faith and not by sight,” and to keep their eye on the unseen, rather than the seen things (2 Cor. 4:18; 5:7). Peter’s experience is a lesson in the *instinct and the obedience of faith*, and is very relevant to today. When the Lord appeared on the water to the embattled disciples in the boat, He clearly identified Himself: “Be of good cheer! It is I” (Matthew 14:27). Peter’s reaction revealed a heart governed by faith. He wanted to be where the Lord was. He considered it safer to be with the Lord Jesus outside the boat than without Him in it.

In fact this seems to have become Peter’s maxim for crises: *be where the Lord is!* Consider his, “Lord, to whom shall we go?” (John 6:68), and his true claim of Mark 10:28. What a turn-around from

the demand with which his discipleship had started off: “Depart from me!”

But, note well, that he didn’t leave the boat without a command. He asked for a “Come” – and got it (Matthew 14:29). Faith is hearing God’s voice and acting on it. Peter’s trouble later was that he couldn’t handle a command *not* to follow (John 13:33,36). “Lord,” he said, “Why cannot I follow you now? I will lay down my life for your sake” (13:37). Disregarding the Lord’s words, Peter *did* try to “be where the Lord was”, and landed himself in disaster. A “faith” that acts against the Lord’s word is neither following nor faith.

Peter’s maxim for crises: be where the Lord is!

The crucifixion did not change Peter’s maxim; he entered the tomb where the Lord had been, and plunged into the sea (John 20:6 and 21:7). But did the ascension put an end to it? Not at all. Though it did transform it.

Now at last, and by the Holy Spirit, Peter was empowered “stand by the cross”. Consider his words on the day of Pentecost: “Therefore, let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36). Note first that he didn’t venture this daring testimony on his own authority. He had



heard his “*Come*.” The Lord had said, “You shall be witnesses to me in Jerusalem...” (1:8). In this witness he first of all identified himself completely with the Man whose crucifixion the powerful Jewish leaders had obtained only a few weeks before. He stood, figuratively, at the last place where a Christ-hating world had seen Him: at His cross. He took his stand where the Lord *had been*. And what would his reward be? In death, he would in the end do what he had vainly promised in John 13:37. He would *be where the Lord had been* (John 21:19). “Where I am, there will my servant be” (John 12:36) would be fulfilled in him. No other disciple had quite this terrifying honour – crucifixion – so far as we are told.

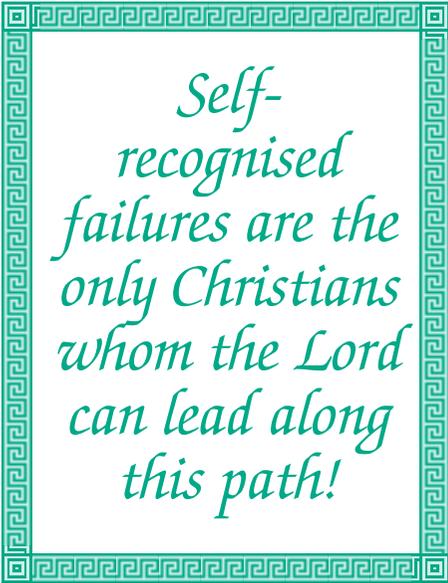
And in the same verse Peter also identified himself, *against the world*, with the place where Christ *is now*. “God has made [Him] both Lord and Christ” (cp. v.33). The citation of Psalm 110:1 (vv.34-5) identifies the present era as temporary. Soon, Christ’s enemies will be made His footstool; soon He will return in visible glory. But in the meantime Peter had the privilege of testifying on earth of His unseen, heavenly glory to those who refused Him. Peter’s maxim was now amplified, and of course followed figuratively, not physically, but it remained his life-guide through the world: be where the Lord *was* (by taking his stand by the cross); be where the Lord *is* (by testifying to His glory). See 1 Peter 5:1.

This should also be our maxim. It is hard to walk through the world with our

eye on an unseen Christ, our ear listening for His voice, our hopes centred on His coming for us, our relationships with men and women governed by the testimony of His cross and His glory, and with all the winds of the world, the flesh and the devil against us. In fact, to nature it is *impossible*. It is “walking on water”. We need greatly to encourage each other in this walk.

Which brings us back to Peter on the water. He failed! But he *had* wanted to be where the Lord was, he *had* asked, and waited, for the Lord’s gracious ‘*Come*’, and he *did* learn something unforgettable through it – that the Lord will never fail those who, however badly, seek by faith to be where He is, listening for His voice. Self-recognised failures are the only Christians whom the Lord can lead along this path!

TB



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God and Relationships, by Cor Bruins

(Morpeth, Scripture Truth Publications, 2006)

A book review

Never thought you could read a book because you are not a “book” person? Think again! Cor’s latest book really is a book that anybody can read and that all *should* read. With several of the family reading this book within a week it shouldn’t take more than a couple of lunch hours to get through, and this allows for time to eat as well – after all, there are other things than relationships in life!

The book is divided into eighteen short chapters that cover a range of issues tied in with the “relationships” theme. The language used is simple without being childish and is quite frank, which is absolutely right. These issues are too important to leave open the possibility of the author being misunderstood, or of mistakes arising from not being sure about what was meant.

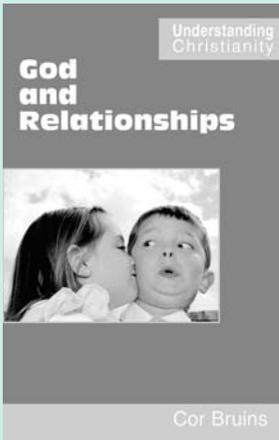
We particularly liked seven of the chapters and the points made in them:

Chapter 1 – There is a strong link between our family life and our assembly life which is often overlooked. The disciplines we learn within the family are just those that are needed within the family of God, and *vice versa*. It is no coincidence that many who cannot accept assembly discipline also struggle within the family.

Chapter 3 – Cor uses this chapter to encourage teenage boys and girls to form strong friendships with several members of the opposite sex, and not to be embarrassed about doing so. Too often young people jump to the “going out together” stage because of peer pressure rather than “just being friends.” As adults we need to give youngsters the space to do this without adding one and one and getting three!

Chapter 4 – How often the need for prayer is overlooked when we consider our relationships! We would never consider preaching the gospel or becoming a missionary without praying about it first. Our relationships should be no different. Enormous spiritual damage has been done by people entering into relationships that, had they prayed about them first, they ought not to have done.

Chapter 6 – It is so important to sort out spiritual responsibilities together early on in a relationship. A positive answer to the question, “Is the person I am interested in spiritually keener than me?” should be a good guide to whether a relationship ought to continue.



Chapter 8 – At last and in print – sex is not dirty. God made us the way we are, knowing just how we would feel. For too long historically the church has viewed sex as sinful or less than God’s best. Cor plainly puts this lie to rest in this straight-talking chapter. Nor is it just a means for having children. What God has given is to be fully enjoyed within marriage.

Chapter 16 – Nobody can be left in any doubt as to the Scriptural teaching on divorce after reading this chapter.

Chapter 17 – There is no need for embarrassment, as this chapter, which deals with sex education, is a useful prequel to year-7 biology.

There were one or two times in the book when we felt that it had a very male perspective. E.g. in chapter 7: it is surely not just the girl that should bring virginity into marriage. Sometimes the book seemed a little dated in its details. Perhaps DVDs and using the internet together could be used as well as board games and books as equally valid ways of spending time together. Is it still necessary for a girl to have to wait to be asked today?

For such a short book there was some repetition. This is not necessarily a bad thing, but as and when this book is reprinted, it could perhaps be reduced, and replaced by direct advice in chapter 5 as to what a couple can do, and at what stages, in terms of physical commitment before marriage. Also the matter of adoption, raised a couple of times, could be answered, perhaps alongside a section on childlessness.

Just two statements struck us as unfortunate. It is to be encouraged that families go to fellowship meetings on Saturdays, especially when large Danish pastries are on offer for supper, or a trip to the chip shop is included. These occasions are valuable opportunities for fellowship both before and after the formal meetings. And we were distinctly uncomfortable with the description of JND as “one of our leaders” – esteemed or otherwise.

These minor distractions should not deter you from reading this book. It is useful particularly for those in their teens, before mistakes are made. It is also useful for parents and for those who have any teaching or pastoral work with young people to use as a framework for discussion with them. On these grounds we can recommend this book as a helpful read.

Jonathan Hughes

Available from the publishers of this magazine at £5.99.

The Good Shepherd

Good Shepherd – searching ceaselessly,
offering up His life for me;
carried by love so tenderly –
upon His shoulders and o'er His heart.

Great Shepherd – rising powerfully,
ascended high for faith to see;
upholding me perpetually –
upon His shoulders and o'er His heart.

Chief Shepherd – coming certainly;
returning for His church to be
glorified eternally –
upon His shoulders and o'er His heart.

Gordon Kell