

THE CHRISTADELPHIAN TIDINGS

of the Kingdom of God

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The CHRISTADELPHIAN TIDINGS of the Kingdom of God

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"If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing" (1Co 13:1,2).

Men are wonderfully scarce now; and men with hearts are rare. If preachers had larger hearts, they would move more people to hear them. A sermon preached without love falls flat and dead. We have heard sermons, admirable in composition, and excellent in doctrine, but like that palace the Empress of Russia built upon the Neva River with blocks of ice. Nothing more lustrous, nothing more sharply cut, nothing more charming; but oh, so cold, so very cold! Its very beauty a frost to the soul!

Charles Spurgeon

Exhortation

An Eighty-Year Journey

An article in a health magazine caught my attention recently, not so much for its content as for its title, *The Eighty-Year Journey*. It had a special relevance to me as I was approaching, all too rapidly, my eightieth birthday. The subject of the article was the common lifespan of today, when more people live to the age of 80 than has been the case in past years. A lot of things, mental and physical, happen to us as we travel this span of life. And certainly a lot of things happen in our world during this period of time, many things that affect us profoundly.

My first impression, approaching this age, was one of disbelief: how could 80 years have gone by so fast! As long as health is relatively good, we don't really notice the changes taking place in our lives and in ourselves. We are jarred sometimes to realize how many family members and acquaintances, how many beloved brothers and sisters in the ecclesia, are no longer with us. Maybe one good thing that happens after this length of time is that the return of our Savior begins to seem closer and more real.

Looking back over an 80-year period, we realize that much has occurred in the world that has served to strengthen our faith, although there have sometimes been disappointments. But many things have transpired on the world scene to verify our hope in the promises of God and their coming fulfillment.

I was born between the world wars. I remember uncles and other acquaintances telling of their experiences in France in 1918, only ten years before I was born, although ten years to a child seemed much longer than it does now. I was told there was a depression during that time, although I had little knowledge of what that meant. My Dad was gainfully employed; only later did I learn that, for many people, times had been really bad. I would come to learn also of the effect those conditions were having on other parts of the world, and how our placid world would be changed as a result.

Sometime in my preschool years, our family life changed dramatically. My Dad had been raised by Christadelphian parents, whereas my mother had joined the Baptist Church as a young woman. Neither was particularly interested in religion until my grandfather's death seemed to awaken something in my father. He took his Dad's books home and began to study the Bible with some diligence. He also contacted the Christadelphians in Houston.

As a result of study and personal discussions, my parents and other family members came to be baptized. Thus I grew up in an ecclesial environment. By the time I started to school, Sunday school and Bible readings were important parts of my life. That, I believe, has been the biggest blessing of my life; it would certainly shape my outlook on everything that would happen in my world.

As it turned out, my Dad would not have the luxury of an 80-year journey. He had been physically strong, but there was a problem with his heart. When he became aware of this, he realized his life would not be a long one. As a result he felt urgency in his service to the Lord, an urgency that he tried to impart to others, especially his family. When I was nine years old, I was listening to my father debating a minister on a public platform. He had so looked forward to the opportunity to proclaim the truth about God's promises, the nature of man, and the coming Kingdom of God on earth. But at that very moment his life abruptly ended. Needless to say, that would have an effect — not only on me, but on everyone who knew him.

My mother's family was not Christadelphian. Although we were very close to my grandparents and the family, there was a special bond with the ecclesial family. This led my mother to marry again, to a brother in the faith. So we children were blessed to have this part of our lives continue relatively unchanged.

By the time I reached junior high school, everyone was very aware there was something ominous in our world. The depression years had been in many ways carefree, and people didn't seem to worry much about world politics. That changed when we started hearing that Europe was again being plunged into war. The radio was our ears to the world, and we began to hear speeches by President Franklin Roosevelt and Prime Minister Winston Churchill of England. And we would hear so often the raging, excited voice of Adolf Hitler. Even as children, we knew our world was changing.

Of course, the brethren talked a lot about the fact that all this was leading us toward the coming of Christ and the Kingdom of God. Christadelphians have always been interested in, and have followed closely, everything relating to the Jews and the land of Palestine. From earliest childhood, we were taught that there would be significant developments relating to the Jewish people. We had always been told to watch for the sign of the Jews returning to the Land of Promise before the coming of God's Kingdom.

Of course, Christadelphians talked a lot about world events and their relation to prophecy. I was always impressed by the fact that, in our magazines and other literature, Christadelphians had always spoken of such signs as fulfilling Bible prophecy — not just when these things began to happen, but in earlier years as well.

When World War II came to an end, and we first learned of the terrible extent of the Holocaust, we were profoundly affected. How thrilled we were to see how the spirit of return to the Land came upon the children of Israel. It seemed that every surviving Jew in Europe was making his or her way back to Palestine. Then in 1947 and 1948 our country supported, and the United Nations approved, an independent State of Israel.

The birth of Israel was, in world affairs, the most thrilling and significant event of my lifetime; I felt privileged to have seen it. Of course, everything did not go as we had hoped; again and again, the time of our Lord's return seemed to have

been delayed. But we hold to our assurance that Christ is coming, and the Kingdom of God with him.

I sometimes miss the obvious fervor of past generations of Christadelphians, but I also take pleasure in the coming of new generations in the service of our Lord. I feel that our God has blessed us greatly and I pray, as surely we all do, that our youth will appreciate the Truth and carry on the work of the Lord.

Eighty years seems a very long time when we are starting out, but the years pass by with incredible speed. You younger ones will begin to realize just how fast as you grow older. The greatest lesson to be taken from the idea of the “80-year journey” is that we should make the time count. We should use our allotted time to serve our Lord, to learn from His Word, making it the guide of our lives, to build up the ecclesia in these last days, and to pass on the true gospel to others.

We have been made aware of the work of past generations in bringing the Truth to this part of the world. But that work has not been limited to past generations. It is still going on, and we can and should be a part of it.

There is a lot of evidence around us today to assure us that the Kingdom of God is coming, that indeed it *must* come.

Every generation of believers, from the time of the apostles until now, has many things in common, the most important of which is the Word of God. Anyone with wisdom can see human history must have a beginning and an end. The Bible explains this to us and, in the process, gives us the only true hope for the future.

In the meantime, the trials and tribulations of every generation of believers have a purpose:

“And some of them of understanding shall fall, to try them, and to purge, and to make them white, even to the time of the end: because it is yet for a time appointed” (Dan 11:35).

Every generation will, one day soon, enjoy the fruits of salvation together, at the “time of the end”.

The Bible is the Word of God, and it alone — and no other “sacred book” — reveals the truth about salvation and the future. The LORD has said,

“I am God, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure” (Isa 46:10).

There shall be a rest with God in “the end”, and we are counseled to “labour to enter into that rest” (Heb 4:11).

God has declared often in His Word that His purpose is to fill the earth with His glory (Num 14:21; Isa 11:9; Hab 2:13,14). There will be a “time of trouble such as never was” (Dan 12:1), but then it will give way to a time of righteousness and peace such as never has been.

One last thing has not changed from generation to generation since apostolic times. We have been commanded to come together to remember and celebrate our Savior’s sacrifice. To celebrate his example of obedience to the Father’s will.

Every generation has gained spiritual strength from this, and all generations have enjoyed fellowship together in our Lord. Each time we meet in this way, we are reminded that, if we follow him, we will sit down with him to eat and drink in his Father's kingdom.

Joseph Banta (Austin Leander, TX)

The Measure of Our Lives

When the Lord God told Adam what the inevitable consequences of sin would be, namely "Thou shalt surely die"; or, as the Hebrew has, "Dying thou shalt die"; he instituted the greatest fact of life as we know it. We are all born to die — and that certainty, consciously or subconsciously, dominates the whole of our lives.

As the Apostle Paul says, "All our lifetime", from cradle to grave, "we are subject to bondage, through fear of death." And so we measure out our lives in periods which conform to the set pattern of mortal span: childhood for growth and training, youth for the beginning of toil and experience; manhood and womanhood to make our mark, for good or ill; and age for decline until the inevitable end.

But death, as many of us have sorrowfully known, does not conform to pattern. Threescore years and ten of life are not for all, and only the fool will count upon them. This very night his soul may be required of him. Some are stricken in childhood, some in the flower of their age, and some with that "crown of thorns", old age, resting upon their wrinkled brow. We know not when — but how bitter is the loss for those who are left! Jesus, with that great sensitivity which he had for the sufferings of men and women, was touched by the feeling of their infirmity in this also.

John Mitchell, People Jesus Knew

*Lord, I am glad for the great gift of living,
Glad for Thy days of sun and of rain;
Grateful for joy, with an endless thanksgiving,
Grateful for laughter — and grateful for pain.*

*Lord, I am glad for the young April's wonder,
Glad for the fullness of long summer days;
And now when the spring and my heart are asunder,
Lord, I give thanks for the dark autumn ways.*

*Sun, bloom, and blossom, O Lord, I remember,
The dream of the spring and its joy I recall;
But now in the silence and pain of November,
Lord, I give thanks to Thee, Giver of all!*

Charles Towne

Editorial

Only Sixty Years

Set against eighty years, sixty years may seem short. But I daresay that, to some, sixty years may seem like several lifetimes. I was born in 1948, the same year that the modern State of Israel was born, and I have just seen my sixtieth birthday, in the very same month, as a matter of fact, in which Bro. Joe Banta turned eighty.

I can echo Bro. Joe's words: "How could ____ years have gone by so fast!" But the Bible tells us why:

"Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God. You turn men back to dust, saying, 'Return to dust, O sons of men.' For a thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night" (Psa 90:2-4).

It is a sobering thought: even the mountains are not necessarily "everlasting". They have had beginnings, and growth and change. If enough time passes — or if they are the subject of some cataclysm, like a great flood or earthquake — then they will have endings as well. But the LORD God Himself *is* everlasting. Seen from His perspective (and that *is* the perspective of the Bible), nothing of God's created world is assured of an eternal existence, at least in its present form.

The Bible tells us that man, especially, is created out of the "dust" of the earth (Gen 2:7), and that, one day, he will return to that very same "dust" (Gen 3:19; Eccl 3:20; 12:7). When we are in the midst of that journey, somewhere between the womb and the tomb, the road may seem so long, stretching out endlessly in front of us, with so many paths to explore, and so many possibilities. But to the LORD, who knows eternity — in fact, who lives in and "inhabits" "eternity" (Isa 57:15) — the longest human life must surely appear no longer than the short dash engraved on the cemetery marker: "Here lies," let us say, "Mr. X (1839 — 1898)." A whole lifetime lies there, in the confines of that little dash carved in stone: growth, childhood, education, career, love, marriage, family, sorrow, suffering, joy, accomplishment, longing, frustration, failure, disappointment, old age, decline, regret, and satisfaction. But it comes so quickly to its end, and then the curtain falls.

Never mind sixty or eighty years, or even a hundred. The psalmist says that even "a thousand years", *in God's sight*, is no more than a single day. And what is one day to us, one out of thousands? But suppose we had *only* one day? One day in which to do everything that we will ever do — like the little mayfly, that must pack a full adult life into a single 24-hour period, or two at most. How our perceptions change!

Then again, the psalmist says that "a thousand years" may seem like a mere "watch

in the night”, a few hours gazing through the darkness, squinting to make out shape and meaning. Then the long, long sleep comes.

“You sweep men away in the sleep of death; they are like the new grass of the morning — though in the morning it springs up new, by evening it is dry and withered” (Psa 90:5,6).

The hot, dry winds of the desert and the relentless rays of the sun may, in one day, turn green grass into brown straw. “All men are like grass,” says Isaiah; “the people are grass”, and “grass withers” (Isa 40:6-8a). On the other hand, “the Word of our God,” he adds — that alone “stands forever” (v 8b).

There is but one meaningful conclusion to such sobering thoughts:

“Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom” (Psa 90:12).

If the Word of God (including the Eternal Purpose embodied in that Word) is truly the one thing that “stands forever”, then what else can we do that is even remotely as important as gaining wisdom from that Word? How else should we spend our days — our brief span of time — than in seeking and acquiring that wisdom, and molding our hearts by it? It is a tragedy of the highest order that so few realize this. We may think that we can with little or no effort position ourselves to glide effortlessly into God’s eternal Kingdom, like pampered passengers on a luxury cruise. Let us all grow up and put away such foolish thoughts. Let us wake up to the magnitude of our opportunities and responsibilities. Let us earnestly seek the true wisdom, like the pearl of great price.

This advice is the same, for the child as well as the adult. However, it is in the nature of things that older ones may more readily grasp its truth, and its absolute importance, as they progress further along their all-too-brief journeys.

Our perceptions of time do change as we grow older. I well remember Bro. Joe, along with Sis. Marie, visiting our ecclesia occasionally when I was a youngster. And finally, when I was about to go off to college in Austin, where they lived, they especially invited me to Bible classes — often preceded by dinner — in their home. These visits became regular occurrences, and were most welcome to a young, and generally hungry, student.

I can recall that, as a teenager, I thought, ‘What a pleasant **older** couple.’ The measure of my perception of time, and relative age, is this: only twenty years later it dawned on me, with a shock, that they had been no older, at that earlier time, than I had so quickly become! And that I didn’t feel, at the age of 38 or 39, anything like an **older** brother, pleasant or otherwise! Just a few years thereafter, it occurred to me that they had by then grown only a very little older than I. And my perception remains to this day as regards Joe, although Marie has passed away. I fully expect that, one day soon, Joe and I will be the same age! So it goes.

So, perhaps, it should be with those who are siblings, children of the same Father. Each believer’s personal experiences will be somewhat different. Those of diverse ages may see some aspects of their world differently. But regardless of such minor differences, they share with one another, but with no others, the special experi-

ence of being a child of God, in its uniqueness and its blessing, its privilege and its comfort. It may be said that, in some hard-to-define way, children of God may begin to develop a sense of the eternal life that is uniquely God's life — even while still shackled with mortality. They may begin intuitively to see the outlines of a life measured not in months and years, but in faith and hope.

There is scarcely anything more gratifying than seeing younger saints and older saints in sweet fellowship with one another, grandparents and grandchildren sharing their lives in love. The young interested in the memories of the old, and the old interested in the plans of the young. The young displaying wisdom more often associated with gray heads. The old showing a joy in life, and a hope for the future that belies their “calendar age.” A “Naomi” and a “Ruth” supporting and encouraging one another. A “Paul” and a “Timothy” working side by side, as true yokefellows. It is then that we see how pointless it is to worry about getting older (what's the alternative?), or thinking of a “generation gap”.

In the sight of our heavenly Father, we are all young children. In the shadow of His everlasting “wings”, and in the embrace of His everlasting “arms” (Deut 33:27), we can be nothing but His children. In the light of eternity, we are all the same age: we are all “little ones” who belong to their Father.

One day, “age” will truly be only a meaningless number. One day, by the grace of God, we will all be the same age absolutely — for we will all be thankfully, joyfully, eternally young!

“Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint” (Isa 40:30,31).

George Booker

“The young Jordan — type of that strange life of ours! Bright and beautiful in its cradle, laughing its merry morning away through the flowery fields of the Huleh; plunging with the recklessness of youth into the tangled breaks and muddy marshes of Merom; hurrying thence, full-grown, like earnest manhood with its noisy and bustling activities, it subsides at length into life's sober mid-day in the placid lake of Gennesaret [the Sea of Galilee]. When it goes forth again, it is down the inevitable proclivity of old age, sinking deeper and deeper, in spite of doublings and windings innumerable, until lost in the bitter sea of death [the Dead Sea] — that melancholy destination from which there is neither escape nor return” (W.M. Thomson, The Land and the Book).

Yet, in the Age to come, the righteous will escape from death, and the Dead Sea will be “healed” by the waters that flow from under the altar of Yahweh (Ezek 47:8-10).

Apologetics

*This is a further article in the series by Bro. David Levin. The previous article appeared in **The Tidings** for June 2007. Future articles will appear (probably at intervals) until the series is complete. These articles will discuss various aspects of living the faith.*

The Hard Questions: (27) Where is God? How Can I Sense His Presence?

*Some people run into trouble with their faith not because of intellectual matters such as the existence of God or the exclusivity problem (these we addressed in previous articles), but because of personal issues such as not sensing the presence of God in their lives. Prayer and providence are the two ways we connect with God in any personal, experiential way [i.e., **related to experience as opposed to other methods of acquiring knowledge**]. Prayer can strengthen our faith, but it can also lead to disillusionment and despair if prayers seem to remain unanswered and the believer does not sense that a real, personal God is actually listening to any request made in prayer. Although answered prayers, especially those that arise from immense distress and desperation, can lead one to sense the presence of God in a powerful fashion, there is also a huge caveat with such prayers: God has no obligation to affirm any prayer that requests a specific outcome for a specific situation. Expectations and hopes unfulfilled from prayers for specific outcomes have become a snare for the faith of many.*

Until this series took a leave of absence several months ago, the articles focused on two general issues: (1) The existence of God, and (2) belief in a single Truth concerning God. We might summarize these two areas of apologetics as first demonstrating *a* God, and then demonstrating *the* God.

The former we could call the issue of theism [*the belief that one God created and rules the world*]; those articles focused on topics such as:

- a. theodicy [*the argument in defense of God's goodness despite the existence of evil*],
- b. classical teleological arguments [*relating to the study of ultimate causes in nature*], and
- c. classical cosmological arguments [*relating to the proof of God's existence from experimental information about the universe*].

This led us at last to consider various aspects of what we can call the exclusivity issue. Overall, the articles argued that the existence of God is more likely than not, and thus it is rational to accept theism. Further questions and inquiries, especially concerning the historical matter of the resurrection of Jesus, lead us to determine what we can know about God, moving our thoughts forward, from theism in general to the particular worship of our Heavenly Father, YHWH, the

God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

There is no more important question or problem in life than the question of belief.

As Blaise Pascal observed, if you are convinced of God's existence, you must set your heart on serving Him. If you are not convinced of God's existence, you must set your heart on finding Him.¹ However, there is more to belief than knowing the intellectual arguments; belief has an equally large experiential component. We can know the arguments and reasons for what we believe, but still find ourselves coming up empty when we attempt to catalogue our actual personal experience with God.

Most *Tidings* readers have no significant problem with the existence of God issue or the exclusivity issue. We are comfortable, at least at the catechismic [*pertaining to simple question-and-answer instruction*] level, with our answers to such questions as "Does God exist?" and "Does it make a difference what we believe?" If asked about what we believe, we can come up with some sort of theological verbiage. Some of us, however, encounter problems with our faith at another level, when we attempt personally to encounter that very God whose existence we can passionately affirm. Herein we find the impetus for the next articles in this series. We want to shift from the academic questions about God's existence to personal questions about our ability to sense the presence of that same God. We turn our attention to this topic because the question "How can I really sense the presence of God?" is a "Hard Question" of prime importance. (Of course, all the hard questions are of prime importance, or they would not be hard questions!)

This question takes us into new and dangerous territory that is seldom trod or mapped. When we inquire about our personal experience with God, we are no longer dealing with knowledge resources, logic, reason, or evidence. We are talking about experience with the Divine. We can know much but experience little, leaving us with an empty, unsure feeling.

- Do I *really* believe what I know is true? Is my heart in tune with my head?
- If I *know* God exists and is a personal God, why can't I have any experience of Him?

When we explore these questions, we are dealing with other forms of evidence and knowledge, and our approach now must take into account these different forms of knowledge.

Two levels of knowledge

To illustrate the difference between these two forms of knowledge of God, think about parachuting from an airplane or bungee-jumping over the Grand Canyon. You know that a parachute allows a person to descend safely while falling thousands of feet. You can read the technical specifications of the bungee cord and learn that it is easily capable of preventing your headlong plunge ending in the Colorado River. You've even seen people perform such feats on TV or at an air show. At an informational level, you know that the simple technologies of a parachute or a bungee cord provide for a safe descent.

However, people who have actually skydived or bungee-jumped will have this knowledge at a much deeper level. I can easily say, “I know that a parachute allows a person to descend safely after jumping out of an airplane in flight.” But that might not at all translate into my being willing to give skydiving a go. And no matter how much I “know” that a bungee cord would support my weight after so many feet of free fall, I have zero interest in putting my life on the line to test the truth of this knowledge.

Experiential learning involves people testing in practice what they know in theory. I will never really know about how parachutes work, and I don’t think that the lack of that particular experience will, in any serious way, be detrimental to my life. But what of experience with God? In some sort of analogous way, we can believe that God exists, but still lack an experiential knowledge of God. The gap between the statement, “I know God exists,” and the experience, “I *know* God exists,” can lead to doubt of even the academic knowledge claim.

If our truest persuasion of God’s existence arises from experience, not “book knowledge,” what can another article possibly contribute? Certainly reading this article, or even the entire series, or all the articles in the *Tidings*, won’t provide any experience of the living God. We don’t experience God through words, written or oral; we experience God primarily through a relationship with the Lord Jesus (Heb 1:1). However, we can write about some of the topics and issues regarding that experience so that we can move our spiritual insight toward that end. We want to know what a genuine experience of the Divine presence would be — if and when we do experience it. And it has to be so that we must *know about* the Lord Jesus before we can *know* the Lord Jesus.

Our task for the present, therefore, will be to examine various points of discussion that bear upon the issue of knowing God in a personal, experiential way. Two topics stand out as especially suitable to this discussion: prayer and providence. These are popular areas of discussion, teaching, and writing in our community, and I don’t intend to make any comprehensive approach to these. I only want to point out certain features of them that bear directly on the matter of sensing God’s presence.

What does it mean to experience God?

Many times I’ve heard believers express sentiments on the order of “I really felt God’s presence with me,” or “I know this was an answered prayer.” Experience with God and/or Jesus seems to come in two manifestations, one being some sort of exceptional peace, comfort, or calmness — that is, an emotional response. The other type of experience is more thoughtful than emotional, but still falls under the heading of personal experience. This occurs when a believer concludes that a particular unusual circumstance, such as a deliverance from certain calamity, could only have come about via Providence. In both types of encounters, the key issue is that the experience provides affirmation of God’s love and care, and that God is indeed present and active in the lives of at least some humans.²

Both types of experience — (a) the emotional/sense-of-presence experience and

(b) the reckoning of circumstances as Divine — are subjective and unverifiable. No one except the individual herself or himself could in any way assert that the person did or did not experience such and so. However, we are not addressing at present the use of personal experience as an apologetic tool. We do want to look at the lack of experience, or the inability to achieve such experience, as a difficulty that can lead to dissolution of faith.

We will first take up the issue of prayer and later explore aspects of providence. Remember, I will confine my inquiries to those aspects of these topics that relate to the maintenance of our faith. We are asking one of the “Hard Questions”: *“Where is God? If God exists and does care about me, why don’t I experience him in my life?”* This is a major issue of faith.

When prayer fails

Proper prayer never fails, but praying people can fail. We fail when we don’t find our prayers answered in the fashion we desire, and then ask where God went, not where we went amiss. We fail in prayer because we request the wrong things. We know that from James 4:3, but James also says that fervent prayer does avail much (5:16). We can ask “amiss”, but “amiss” can include more than the obvious. The following categories will cover most of what we generally reckon as “wrong” praying that won’t move God on our behalf:

- (1) Asking for selfish goals or ends,
- (2) Not really believing the prayer will be answered, and
- (3) Failing to be in the proper spiritual frame of mind to communicate with God.

Obviously, there’s some overlap among my hastily-thought-out analysis here, but the idea is that praying “amiss” doesn’t necessarily mean asking for a pay raise or parking space. It isn’t confined to the evangelical “send us fifty dollars and we’ll pray for your kidneys.” Neither is it limited to the shallowness of the modern form of the “prayer of the just”: “Lord, we just want to thank you and we just want to praise you...” (as if boasting that nothing else could possibly be on our minds). The fact is that prayer that makes *any* specific request (I’ll clarify that phrase shortly) is asking for trouble. God will only answer two prayers always in the affirmative; anything else must be understood as auxiliary to the main intent of prayer.

Prayers that are ALWAYS answered “Yes”

As I just provocatively wrote, God will regard only two types of prayer *always* in the affirmative. Heartfelt prayers for *forgiveness* and for *spiritual growth* will always receive a “Yes”. Any other prayer request is “maybe, conditional, and not necessarily”. These others prayers are prayers for *specific outcomes*, and even though we can offer them with great passion, goodwill, and faith in their positive outcome, God cannot regard them as necessary directives.³ We pray for the safety of those we know who are traveling; we pray for the repentance of our loved ones who have left the fold; we pray for God’s healing hand to bless the sick and infirm; and we pray for the success of our preaching efforts and Bible seminars. We pray for the welfare of those at Bible school and those attending weekend

gatherings. We pray for unity, and we pray for our brothers and sisters who live in lands impoverished by war and natural disasters.

There can be no question that we can be fervent in prayer on behalf of others, and we would certainly not think for a moment that such prayers could qualify as “amiss”. Probably in the strict sense and context of James 4:3, they aren’t. However, the outcomes are not always as prayed for. Our sick members don’t always recover. Generations of believers have prayed for unity in North America, but it seems as evasive as ever. The afflictions of the world befall our members just as surely as they do the population in general, even with massive prayer on their behalf. We can prepare dutifully for a preaching effort, and organize specific ecclesial prayer for God to give the increase, but the seats in the seminar room remain empty. All these examples aim to promote causes the Almighty surely endorses: the welfare, increase, and unity of the Body of Christ, causes for which we are specifically enjoined to pray (e.g., Rom 15:30,31; Eph 6:19; Matt 9:38). How then could such prayers fall short or fall into the “amiss” column? Because two other significant and weighty implications bear on these types of prayers. One of these has to do with God’s sovereignty, and the other with our own spiritual welfare.

Before I detail these, however, let me back up and conclude the brief discussion about the two prayers to which God *always* answers “Yes”. These are prayers for *forgiveness* and *spiritual growth*. How can we be so bold as to assert that God will always answer these prayers affirmatively? If we asked the question from the negative side, it might be more obvious: “Will God ever refuse anyone’s prayer for forgiveness or spiritual growth?” Aside from the objection that such prayer must be sincere, the answer to these requests clearly differs from a materially specific request or for a specific outcome of some trial. As for the “sincerity” of the prayer, that’s always an issue, and a subjective matter between the disciple and God. Sincerity is an issue for any type of prayer, so we needn’t place any special caveats on prayers for forgiveness or spiritual growth. Instead, consider the following Scriptures:

“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God who gives to all men generously and without reproaching, and it will be given him” (James 1:5).

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1Jo 1:9).

These clear “if-then” declarations tell us that God *will* answer these prayers with a “Yes”. God is the only true source of forgiveness and spiritual wisdom. Not only is Scripture clear here, but it is also obvious that God will always be in concord with our desires for forgiveness and spiritual growth. As for specific outcomes (such as physical healing), we have no such guarantee or assurance. In our current situation (this “mortal dispensation”), God will not always grant physical healing, but will always grant the spiritual resources we need to keep our faith during any calamity. If we focus ourselves on gaining the spiritual resources needed to deal with problems, we will receive strength, we will experience God, and we will endure the trials of life.

Praying for a favorable outcome as the main focus — while neglecting or minimizing God's hand in those areas where He will surely bless — will limit our contact with God and hence our sense of personal experience. For instance, if you are looking for a job and pray fervently for God to help, you could become discouraged if God's purpose for you at that time is best suited by your failing to get the job. However, if your prayer is that God will help you to use the situation to grow spiritually, regardless of the outcome of the job search, then you have the certainty of God's presence and the opportunity truly to experience God as a personal being in your life.

What about Jesus' own words?

You might be thinking of a few places that state otherwise. The words of Jesus recorded in these Scriptures seem to give a carte blanche to our prayer requests:

"Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you receive it, and you will" (Mark 11:24).

"Whatever you ask in my name, I will do it. If you ask anything in my name, I will do it" (John 14:13,14).

"If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you" (John 15:7).

"Truly, truly I say to you, if you ask anything of the Father, he will give it to you in my name" (John 16:23).

What might we want to include or exclude when Jesus says "whatever" and "anything"? Do we have any warrant to limit what the Lord repeatedly asserts? Yes, we do, on the grounds of experience, context, and other Scriptures. We have experience to the contrary, for it is plain that we do **not** always receive whatever we ask. James' provisos of "asking in faith" (1:6) and not "asking amiss, to spend it on your passions" (4:3), apply in a general sense, but they hardly make sense as limiting Jesus' open-ended invitation. It is still plain that when we pray on behalf of others, we are asking in deep faith and certainly not indulging our passions, yet we still don't have assurance of an affirmative answer.

The context of the passages in Mark is that of forgiveness, as you will note by reading the next verse. Forgiveness is also the context in John, although it is less obvious.⁴ In brief, the passages in John are all in Jesus' final exhortation and appeal to the disciples. The entire context has to do with his continuing work and the disciples abiding in him. His continuing work comes under the heading of "the Counselor" (KJV "Comforter"; Greek *parakletos*), who turns out to be his risen self, the resurrected Jesus. John himself identifies the *parakletos* and interprets the breadth of "whatever" and "anything":

*"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. My little children, I am writing this to you so that you may not sin; but if anyone does sin, we have an advocate (**parakletos**) with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1Jo 1:9-2:1, RSV).*

When John writes that Jesus will cleanse us of all sin, he is clarifying the Lord's apparently open-ended statement made just before the offering of himself for sin. In context, "anything" and "whatever" mean "any sin". There is no sin that is so great that we can't find forgiveness in Jesus. These Scriptures are not just general spiritual encouragement; they assure us of the certainty of forgiveness despite whatever mess we might make of our lives.

Spiritual growth and trial

Forgiveness and spiritual growth are closely related concepts, but they differ "as far as east is from west" in their emotional and practical dimensions. Forgiveness brings the breath of life, the touch of Divine healing, the burden lifted and the restoration of our spirit (e.g., Psa 51:7-10). Spiritual growth, on the other hand, entails trials and despairs of life, as attested many places in the Bible (e.g., James 1:2-4; Heb 12:5-11). In short, the prayer for spiritual growth is very likely a prayer for pain and suffering. Is it possible to follow Jesus any other way? Yet, this is the prayer that God will always answer "Yes", and we must remember that James 1:5 comes directly after James 1:2-4.

***Note:** There is the specific caveat regarding the following section, "Connecting with God". Prayer is one of the two dimensions of faith (the other being providence) that experientially connect us with God. If the focus of our prayer life is on specific requests that are either likely to remain unfilled, or worse, telling God what we expect Him to do, we run a high risk of disillusionment. Expectations unfulfilled is half of the issue; the other half would be that when we reduce prayer to evangelical tokenism, we are missing a good part of what our prayer life should involve. And if this dimension is missing from one of the two avenues in which we can experience God's presence, we will obviously suffer from some sort of disengagement. Prayer is a far too spiritual venture to have it focus on the temporal circumstances of life, no matter how much they present their urgency upon us. If we come to think of God as primarily one to go to in the day of physical troubles, the snare is set for the trap of disillusionment — a spiritual sickness for which I have yet to see a prayer request sent out for anyone. It's almost paradoxical at one level, but thinking a bit further, it makes sense. If we get a skewed perception of how God answers prayer, we have a skewed perception of God and His overall purpose, and that will unquestionably tax our faith when we most need it.*

Connecting with God in prayer

I still endorse the practice of our widespread communal prayer on behalf of our hurting members, exactly the same way as we do. But I endorse it with a wider perspective on the meaning and purpose of prayer. Remember, **any** prayer that requests a specific outcome (whether it be the healing of a sick brother or sister, or to get a job, or anything else) — no matter how beneficial the outcome might be on the temporal scale — is problematic. It places us in uncertain waters and

emphasizes an aspect of providence that may or may not be realized. However, the very same prayer can offer ***absolutely certain*** spiritual benefits both for the people praying and for the person for whom the prayer is offered.

When we pray, we are talking to ourselves as much as we are talking to God, and we are telling ourselves what is important to us. When we find ourselves highly focused and emotionally involved in praying for another's welfare, we know that this is an act of love, and we feel connected to that person and to the God of comfort. We have tested our hearts, and found ourselves moved with compassion. Further, there is hardly anything more encouraging to a recipient of prayer than to know that your brothers and sisters are appealing to our Heavenly Father on your behalf. That will always have a positive effect; it depends not on any outcome. Even if the person might be unconscious or otherwise unaware of the prayers taken to the highest altar on his or her behalf, the person's support system will know that, and convey that encouragement and hope to the suffering person. We recognize the power of prayer, and we ought also to recognize the avenue of prayer's efficacy. It is in the act of prayer that we find focus, connection with God, the sifting of our values, and the encouragement of the faithful. When we pray in this vein, we cannot fail to comprehend the presence of a living God who has a personal concern for our welfare.

When our prayers remain focused on seeking spiritual strength to cope with the problem, regardless of the outcome, we are requesting what God will surely bestow, spiritual growth. In doing so, we will most assuredly experience God, and know God in the manner that comes only through real life learning. If our prayers, however, are based primarily (or solely) on asking for a specific outcome, we will find the presence of God only if the petition comes to pass. If not, discouragement and ultimate disillusionment ensue, in many cases leading to damaged faith.

If we pray that God grant the afflicted individual and his or her support system the strength to bear up to whatever the situation demands, then we will feel connected to God; and the afflicted person(s) will have spiritual support no matter what the temporal outcome. The ultimate recipient in petition for another's welfare is, in fact, our own sense of nearness with God. God will support the afflicted party in his or her own prayers to understand and endure trial, and our prayers will be in concert with theirs and with God's will. We cannot fail to draw closer to God with this attitude, regardless of what temporal outcome God might direct for that individual, or what that individual's free will choice has determined for his or her life.

Community petitional prayer

We have a well-developed aspect of our spiritual community that keeps us informed as to the welfare of our brothers and sisters. Should any of us encounter a major health, financial, or other crisis, we know that our spiritual family will be solicited for prayers on our behalf. We have a wonderful and supportive network, and I wouldn't want my comments here to be taken as critical of those who disseminate information and pray for the sick and distressed among us. In our home we regularly pray for the temporal welfare of our afflicted brothers and sisters. I

do want to point out, however, the perspective we ought to have so as best to use the resource of prayer. Some basics to keep in mind include:

1. The only prayers to which God will *always* answer “Yes” are those for spiritual growth and forgiveness. Asking God for any specific blessing or outcome exceeds our knowledge as to what is in our eternal best interest.
2. Anytime we pray for a specific outcome, such as someone’s recovery, *we don’t know God’s will* for that person. Asking for a specific outcome (usually the recovery of the person) is telling God what He ought to do. This may not accord with His intentions in the matter, and thus we could be praying for an outcome contrary to God’s will.
3. Even when we append “If it be your will” to such prayers, we are still praying for a person’s recovery, and thus we are setting our hearts on that outcome. We want the person to recover, and we are hoping to align God on our side.
4. Everyone is going to die of something, and there is absolutely no guarantee of that being of natural causes in our dotage (see earlier articles in this series on theodicy and the fairness of God).
5. What distinguishes God’s children from the rest of humanity is that we have an understanding of human nature and our suffering, not of any protection or expectation of relief from suffering.
6. The greatest need of a person enduring a crisis (and of that person’s close family and support system) is that of God’s grace and peace. The suffering need to understand the meaning of their anguish and pain, and to be comforted during the trial. “The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity, but a wounded spirit who can bear?” (Prov 18:14). *God is more interested in how we spiritually cope with the trial than in the physical outcome.* If this is God’s perspective, should ours be any different?
7. Setting our hopes on the “cure” can lead to disillusionment and even greater despair if physical restoration is not God’s will for that person. This is a major concern. If we lose perspective of our position before God and expect that we can alter the course of life by prevailing upon enough believers only to pray hard enough, then we are setting ourselves up for serious despair.

In summary, let us return to the reason I put a discussion of petitional prayer into the agenda of our Hard Questions. We have a contextual issue. We do pray appropriately, but I’m not so sure the context of our prayers is often well understood. Many people do connect with God in prayer, and many others find this a vain exercise that leaves them empty and void. It is to these that I address my remarks. We *can* experience God through prayer, regardless of any specific outcome, when we pray in the context of what God has already taught us about mortal life before our Lord’s advent.

David Levin (Baltimore, MD)

(Next: *Experiencing God’s Providence*)

Notes:

1. Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, #194.
2. These types of evidence for and of a personal God fall into a category other than the academically oriented arguments we have previously employed. Typically, personal experiences have

- very little apologetic value; they might serve to bolster the faith of the individual with the experience, but very few people would come to be believers based on others' account of God's activity in their lives. The use of personal testimony in apologetics or preaching work has very limited utility; their value isolates upon the individual who has had the experience.
3. A contemporary comedian, Emo Phillips, has humorously lighted upon this principle: "When I was a kid I used to pray every night for a new bicycle. Then I realized that the Lord doesn't work that way, so I stole one and asked for forgiveness."
 4. For a more extensive analysis of these passages, see my *Tidings* articles, "The Comforter", August and September, 1995.

Prayer

"Do not pray for easy lives; pray to be stronger. Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers; pray for powers equal to your tasks. Then the doing of your work shall be no miracle, but you shall be a miracle. Every day you shall wonder at yourself, at the richness of life which has come to you by the grace of God" (Phillip Brooks).

"Never pray for more than you can put to use" (Scottish proverb).

"Courage is fear that has said its prayers" (Karl Barth).

"Prayer is far more than uttering words. I can pray when I do not think I am praying. We can pray without any words at all. Prayer, in the last analysis, is the urge of the life towards God, and spiritual things; the setting of the mind upon things above, as Paul has it. Every detail of every day can be mastered by that urge" (G. Campbell Morgan).

"Prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance, but beseeching His willingness" (Nigel Patterson).

"Don't pray to escape trouble. Don't pray to be more comfortable. Pray to do the will of God in every situation" (Samuel Shoemaker).

"The last and highest result of prayer is not the securing of this or that gift, the avoiding of this or that danger. The last and highest result of prayer is the knowledge of God — the knowledge which is eternal life — and by that knowledge, the transformation of human character, and of the world" (George John Blewett).

Exposition

Paul's Letter to the Ephesians: (13) Paul's appeal for total unity

We shall now begin to consider Ephesians 4. But first, we must recall how, in Ephesians 2, Paul stressed the great concept of the unity of Jew and Gentile in Christ Jesus.

Through the Lord's work, Jew and Gentile had become one. Paul had shown this by using the "with" prefixes — "syn" and "sym". These prefixes have passed into English in such words as "sympathy" and "synthesis".

The prefix we now have in mind is "huper", or "hyper", which appears in many English words: "hypersensitive", "hyperactive", etc. The Greek word can have two meanings. The one of interest at present is "over and above, beyond, more than"; this is brought out admirably in Ephesians 3:20:

"Now to him who by the power at work in us is able to do far more abundantly than we ask or think" (RSV).

In the previous v 19, the love of Christ "surpasses knowledge" (RSV). This love is a transcendent love, and the use of "hyper" brought this home to Paul's readers in the first century.

The prisoner in the Lord

Having thus brought before his readers the inestimable privileges they enjoy in the Lord Jesus, Paul — whose mind can move on the highest level — is also fully conscious of the obligations placed upon every believer. This he does by the simple expedient of using the word "therefore":

"I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beseech you to walk worthily of the calling wherewith ye were called" (Eph 4:1).

It is the force of this word "therefore" that counts. Another well-known instance is at the beginning of Romans 12:

"I beseech you therefore, brethren... to present your bodies a living sacrifice" (v 1).

When we reflect upon the aspects of faith in the Lord that have been covered in this great Roman letter, we begin to appreciate the force of "therefore". In the instance of his appeal in Ephesians 3:1, Paul had been a prisoner in Rome because of his special mission to the Gentiles. This explains his lengthy digression on the status of Gentile disciples in the Lord. Now he addresses himself to all his readers, Jew and Gentile. It is as a prisoner of the **Lord** that he speaks. Jesus himself had stressed in the upper room:

"Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am" (John 13:13).

As the result of his submission to his Father's will in Gethsemane and Calvary, he had been given the name that is above every name (Phi 2:9). Now all Paul's

readers shared in the unique privileges available only to those who respond to the offer of salvation in Jesus.

“Walk worthy...”

Their walk, or conduct, is to be worthy of their calling, and the way this is to be exhibited is in keeping with the teaching of the Master: “with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love” (Eph 4:2). As is generally recognized, this insistence on lowliness and meekness is not in keeping with the philosophy of the Greeks and Romans; they were more often associated with the domination and subjection of slavery. But in Christ Jesus, God had called into existence a new society. For members of this society, there was a phenomenon at Colosse which would be incomprehensible to the Greco-Roman world: a master (Philemon) and his runaway slave (Onesimus) could sit in the same assembly on the first day of the week and break bread together in memory of the Lord who had died for them both. This completely new situation is described in Colossians 3:11:

“There cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bondman, freeman: but Christ is all, and in all.”

It is doubtful whether the quality of meekness will advance one’s cause in our contemporary world. But the Lord in his teaching makes its importance fundamentally clear:

“Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth” (Matt 5:5)...

“Verily I say unto you, Except ye turn, and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven; whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (18:3,4).

The Lord himself is the supreme example of humility:

“Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls” (Matt 11:29).

The subject of the Lord’s own humility is indeed important: we can learn from him, and especially from his example. Passages commonly invoked in this connection are Philippians 2:5-11 and John 13:3-15. These are examples of humility displayed by our Lord during his earthly life, but the one we are now to consider speaks of the time when, as the Lord of all mankind, he will return with irresistible power, attended by the angels (see 2Th 1:7-10). It will be then that the glorified Lord will show his gratitude to his faithful servants. They will not be told to bow before him, which would be their spontaneous reaction. Rather, the emphasis is upon what the Lord himself will do:

“Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself [as in John 13:4], and make them sit down to meat, and shall come and serve them” (Luke 12:37).

What a joyful assembly that will be, far beyond anything we can experience now. But what is so unique about this event is the example of gracious appreciation shown by the Lord to those who, despite their weaknesses and failings, have endeavored to love and serve him. Now he treats them, not as servants, but as

his honored “guests”. Thus we understand that, when Paul spoke of the Second Coming, the great prospect for him was simply to be with his Lord (1Th 4:17).

A call to unity

In Ephesians 4:3 there is a call to unity: they are to give “diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”. We recall once again the divisive action of the Judaizers in the Lycus valley. One of the sad features of human behavior is the ease and frequency with which a community can break up into factions. It is likely that Paul was reminded of the difficulties of the Corinth ecclesia when he wrote these words to the Ephesians:

“I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought” (1Co 1:10).

When we consult the Book of Acts, with its honest record of the earliest days, we do not have to proceed far before we read of the discontent about the distribution of assistance. The Greek-speaking Jewish believers felt the widows of those disciples who spoke Hebrew (i.e., Aramaic) were being favored at the expense of their own widows (Acts 6:1). Earlier there had been the dark episode when Ananias and Sapphira had sought to deceive the Holy Spirit, with tragic consequences (Acts 5:1-10). The sorcerer Simon, after his baptism, thought he could bribe Peter and John to give him the power to bestow the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14-23).

The great and vexing problem of the relationship of uncircumcised disciples to the Law of Moses has already received ample notice in this series of studies. It was, as we have seen repeatedly, the source of the problems among the Colossians. Paul’s letters are constantly concerned with difficulties that had arisen in the early ecclesias he had founded, and he had no illusions about the problems that would later arise. In his moving address to the Ephesian elders at Miletus, he declared:

“I know that after my departing grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock” (Acts 20:29).

Even the apostle John was to encounter opposition: in his third letter he brings to our attention a certain Diotrephes. This believer loved to have the pre-eminence in his assembly, prating against John “with wicked words” (3Jo 1:9,10).

Personal ambition has no place in the life of true disciples. After baptism, the “old man” is still very much alive. Even Paul did not regard himself as an exception in this respect; he wrote to the Corinthians, whom he was seeking to correct:

“But I buffet my body, and bring it into bondage: lest by any means, after that I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected” (1Co 9:27).

There can be little doubt of his success, for among his final recorded words, there is this great assurance:

“Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give to me at that day: and not only to me, but also to all them that have loved his appearing” (2Ti 4:8).

Schism and problems of various kinds have characterized the history of the faith from the earliest days. This reflection enables us to see our personal weaknesses

and the problems that have beset our community in a proper and sobering perspective. Finally, as will be revealed in the great day, “there is one body, and one spirit... one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in all” (Eph 4:4-6).

The quality of love

There could be no more sobering message than this. The apostle, in Ephesians and Colossians, helps us wonderfully to understand how that unity can be achieved. What will matter finally is the quality of *love*. After rehearsing, in Colossians 3, the attributes essential in a follower of the Lord — and these should be our preoccupation! — the apostle adds, significantly:

“And above all these things... love, which is the bond of perfectness” (v 14).

The NIV helps us here:

“And over all these virtues put on love which binds them all together in perfect unity.”

Paul is constantly speaking of love: in Ephesians alone it appears ten times. His awareness of what the Lord said in the upper room (see John 13:34; 15:12,17) is demonstrated in Ephesians 5:2:

“Walk in love, even as Christ also loved you.”

There is nothing vague about love: it is a fragrant compound, and Paul indicates the constituents that together give it fragrance in the celebrated chapter 1 Corinthians 13:

“Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends...” (vv 4-8, NRSV).

There may be variations in the rendering of the Greek, but the way love reveals itself is clear in all versions.

In this same chapter the apostle makes crystal clear that any record of discipleship that is not a manifestation of love is not acceptable. An individual's record may be spectacular but, if it is not a manifestation of love, it carries no weight. This had to be understood by the readers of Paul's letter: it is love (v 2) that gives real unity to the body, and so ensures peace (v 3). For there is only one body (v 4), to which life is communicated by one spirit — the spirit of love, the spirit of Christ:

“If any man hath not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his” (Rom 8:9).

Paul continues to pursue the theme of unity: “one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all, and in all” (vv. 5, 6). That there is but one God, the Creator, the sovereign of the universe, is a concept that need not detain us; the whole of Scripture testifies to this fundamental truth.

One faith and one baptism

However, when we consider the notion of one faith and one baptism, and look back over the history of Christianity, and indeed of any distinct community, we are faced with difficulty. What we have already considered is nevertheless a

guide. Where doubtful issues have been debated — in a spirit of acrimony and self-righteousness, with a total absence of love, and failure or even refusal to understand what others are saying — the outcome is scarcely likely to receive the seal of divine approval.

But can we even hope to arrive at an understanding of what is a faith acceptable to our God and to the Lord Jesus? Paul must evidently have possessed this conviction; otherwise, how could he honestly speak of the unity of the faith?

What better can we do than look once more at Luke's record in the Acts. On the day of Pentecost, in fulfillment of the Lord's own promise, the Twelve received the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth. They too were to bear their personal witness (see John 15:26,27). Then when Peter (for the first time after the Lord's ascension) preached the gospel of salvation in Jerusalem, he was invested with divine authority. There were 3,000 converts that day, Jews and proselytes, some living in Jerusalem, others from all over the Roman empire and beyond — who responded by being baptized (Acts 2:41). We can understand that after their baptism, they would want to know a great deal more about the Lord Jesus, the promised Messiah crucified by his own people. First we note Peter elaborated at some length on what is preserved of his discourse ("with many other words": v 40). Then we take note of verse 42, referring to the apostles' teaching and fellowship. This testimony would be the basis and substance of what is preserved in the four gospel records. The contents of the latter had to be in harmony with what those earliest converts learned on the day of Pentecost — otherwise there would have been confusion among the earliest believers.

We do well, therefore, to give special attention to Acts 2 and 3, if we desire to arrive at the unity of the faith.

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Henry Alford

On a day in 1827, sixteen-year-old Henry Alford wrote in his Bible: "I do this day, as in the presence of God and my own soul, renew my covenant with God, and solemnly determine henceforth to become His, and to do His work as far as in me lies."

The young man grew up to be a preacher, minister, and teacher. He wrote hymns, the most notable of which is: "Come, ye thankful people, come..."

Among scholars, he is best known for his commentary on the Greek New Testament, on which he labored for eighteen years.

It was said that in his preaching Henry Alford was considered something of a radical by the more conservative of his church leaders, but that his good humor and friendliness won him their affection nonetheless. He was noted for being able to see the best points in different Christian positions, however much he might disagree with them.

Bible Study

Little Words that Mean a Lot (6) Watchman

*“Watchman, what of the night?
Watchman, what of the night?”
(Isa 21:11).*

In the year 117 AD, Publius Aelius Hadrianus, known simply to us as Hadrian, became emperor of the Roman Empire. Upon ascending the throne he took the radical step of visiting firsthand every territory and frontier ruled by Rome — something no other emperor had ever done. It is said that, on visiting Britannia, the northernmost outpost of the empire, he decided that the Celtic tribes inhabiting what we now call Scotland could not be civilized, and therefore the best policy was to contain them. He ordered his legions to build a great wall 80 miles long across the narrowest part of the country, from the Irish Sea on the west to the North Sea on the east, to keep out the Pict warriors.¹ Remnants of this wall can still be seen today.

In its original form Hadrian's Wall was built mostly of stone and was eight to ten feet wide at its base, and 15 feet in height, with a path at the top for the watchman to patrol. At every one-third of a mile a raised watchtower for signaling was constructed, and for each mile along the wall a more substantial castle-like structure was built housing some 60 legionnaires. These mile-castles guarded a portal gate through the wall that was intended for trade and commerce. It is thought to have taken six to eight years to complete the wall, and that the construction occupied three full legions (comprising approximately 15,000 men). Once the edifice was in place, watchmen patrolled it day and night. Any attempt to scale or breach the wall caused them to relay signals to arouse the encamped legions; these were billeted in 16 larger forts each holding up to 1,000 men. For the next three centuries this wall protected Roman Britannia from the savage Celtic tribes to the north.

The job of the watchman

The job of the watchman was of extreme importance, and the code of the Roman legions enacted severe punishment on any sentry who failed in his duty. The penalty for sleeping on watch was public clubbing to death by his fellow legionnaires, in front of the whole cohort.² We do not know in detail what the military code was for watch duty for those sentries who guarded the walls of Israelite and Judean cities in the time of the Kings, but the Scriptures hint at equal severity — for the lives of many were in the hands of the watchman. So important did the King James translators regard the concept of “watchfulness” that they used thirteen different variants on the word “watch” to translate the various Hebrew and Greek equivalents.³ With this in mind we have the means of appreciating the parallels that are drawn between watch duty and spiritual vigilance in our Scriptures.

We get some insight into the responsibilities of a watchman in 2 Kings 9:17 (NKJV):

“Now a watchman stood on the tower in Jezreel, and he saw the company of Jehu as he came, and said, ‘I see a company of men.’”

Here the Hebrew word “watchman” means “to peer out into the distance”; it comes from a primitive root having the sense of “leaning forward”.^{4, 5} We may think here of one who gazes out into the distance, trying to anticipate danger. The watchman in Biblical times had no binoculars or telescope; he had to rely on his keen senses, and maintain due diligence — being alert to any danger — so he could sound the alarm before it was too late.

Foreseeing spiritual danger

Our Lord Jesus Christ alludes to the ability to sense spiritual danger before it occurs:

“But know this, that if the good man of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up” (Matt 24:43).

If we don’t foresee spiritual danger it will take us unawares, and we will be ensnared in the consequences. We can relate to this at many levels in our daily walk. For example, parents have a responsibility to guide their children and see that they avoid bad companions. It is important for parents to have an open relationship with their children, especially in the teenage years when the temptation to emulate their peers may not always lead to good consequences. If the parent-child relationship is close and loving, then virtually all the evils that prevail in this world can be avoided. The apostle Paul exhorts parents not to discourage their children and thus, by implication, to bring them up in a loving way (Col 3:21).

The same sense of anticipation applies to choosing a mate, sorting out challenges in our marriages, and dealing with problems on the job, to cite a few examples. In this age we can get wrapped up in the concept of success, which in the world’s sense of values is best described by the bumper sticker I once saw on a luxurious sport car; it read: “The one with the most toys wins.” If we fall into this mode of life, brothers and sisters can work such long hours and devote so much time to their careers that their children, family and ecclesial relationships suffer. One might have the best home and the most elegant automobiles, and vacation in the most exotic places — and yet lose the greatest treasure of all: our eternal inheritance. Failure to anticipate the spiritual consequences of a life that places God second would make one a very poor watchman indeed.

Guarding and protecting

There is another aspect of being a good watchman that is embodied in the Hebrew word used in the passage in Ezekiel 3:17 (NKJV):

“Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore hear a word from My mouth, and give them warning from Me” (see also Ezek 33:2,7).

Here the word has a sense of guarding or protecting.⁶ It is not enough to anticipate

danger; we also have to do something about it. The legionnaires on sentry duty patrolling Hadrian's Wall not only needed to signal the cohorts of an impending attack, but they also had to be prepared to draw their own swords and be the first to defend the barricade.

We live in an age of non-involvement; the sense of community and of mutual dependence that once existed has largely disappeared. The hectic nature of modern life has a way of swamping us. We must put our own needs aside when it comes to aiding others. Many of our brothers and sisters desperately require our time, energy and resources to cope. If we are diligent watchmen, we will be aware of that need. We must go beyond awareness: we ought to be willing to guard and protect them.

Ezekiel 33 is a primer in what the Lord God expects of a spiritual "watchman". The following points should be noted in that chapter:

- (a) Verse 1: The watchman's weapon is the "word of God" (cp. also Isa 55:11). The apostle Paul styles this as "the sword of the spirit" (Eph 6:17).
- (b) Verse 3: Warnings must be loud and clear. The Judean sentries would have sounded the alarm using a shofar, an instrument made from the bent horn of a ram. It makes a blaring sound that is as irritating as it is hard to ignore.
- (c) Verses 4,5: The responsibility for acting upon the watchman's warning is upon the individual who hears the shofar (cp. also James 4:17). If one ignores the alarm, because one is preoccupied with other affairs, then blood would be upon that person's own head.
- (d) Verses 8,9: If the watchman failed to warn of danger, then the blood of the victims would be upon the watchman's head. In placing this sentence upon a spiritual watchman who was derelict in his duty, the conclusion in these verses is perfectly in line with the death sentence that probably would have been passed upon a sentry who failed in his responsibilities while guarding the walls of Jerusalem. From Roman to modern times, a sentry who fails in his obligations has been subject to court-martial under the Uniform Code of Military Justice; the guilty could expect the severest penalty.

The spiritual "watchman"

Given the awesome responsibilities of a spiritual watchman, how can we prepare ourselves to do the job to the best of our abilities? In the Roman legions not all were assigned watch duty. The task generally fell to the younger legionnaires, who were more apt to have the energy and clear eyesight that often falters with age. The converse, however, may be the case for a spiritual watchman. Our ability to be proactive in sensing the needs of others, and having the wherewithal to do something about it, should increase with age and experience. Unfortunately, we don't necessarily grow older and wiser. That will not occur naturally. We need to work at it. The apostle Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, gives us a vivid exhortation on how we can become the very best spiritual watchman. The apostle uses the imagery of the completely outfitted Roman legionnaire as a metaphor

for the preparation necessary for a well-armed spiritual warrior. In Ephesians 6, we are told to:

- (a) “Put on the whole armor of God” (v 13). Incomplete outfitting for a soldier could have disastrous consequences: the enemy would then seek to strike at the weakest point. It is equally true of the spiritual warrior. If organizing our time is our weak point, we will never find time to serve God properly. Each of us is given the same 168 hours per week in which to live. How we organize that time is simply a matter of priorities. Why is it that obstacles seldom interfere with us making a buck, but become insurmountable in making sure we are supporting the meeting, or finding time to help our brothers and sisters in need?
- (b) ... “With the belt of truth buckled around your waist” (v 14, NIV). Truth needs to encircle the watchman completely. If we are not enveloped in Truth, any warning we may give others is probably going to go unheeded. Saying ‘Do as I say, not as I do’ is unacceptable; it only makes us seem hypocritical.
- (c) ...And “the breastplate of righteousness” (v 14). The breastplate protects the most vulnerable part of the body. The ancients believed that the heart was not only the seat of life, but also of the intellect. Our heart has to be in the right before we dare tell anyone else how to live.
- (d) ...Having the “feet shod with the preparation of the gospel” (v 15). If properly fitted with these “shoes”, we are prepared to go anywhere to aid others. The Roman legionnaires marched everywhere; they didn’t have motorized transport to carry them.⁷ It is said that the only thing that limited their mobility was how far and how fast they could move on their feet. The metaphor here applies to us having the same dedication for spiritual mobility.
- (e) The “shield of faith” (v 16). The soldier’s shield protected him from objects hurled from afar, whether it was arrows, darts, javelins, or stones. Likewise the shield of faith protects from all the evils of the world that can be heaved at us.
- (f) The “helmet of salvation” (v 17). A blow to the head is a fatal blow (Gen 3:15). A legionnaire would never have thought of going into battle without his head protected. The soldier of Christ must keep his wits about him at all times. Filling our minds with the Word of God puts upon us the helmet of salvation.
- (g) And finally, the “sword of the Spirit” (v 17). This is the only offensive weapon given to the Christian soldier. The apostle Paul tells us: “...Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh” (Gal 5:16; see also Rom 8:14, 1Co 3:16; 12:8, among others). If the Word of God is in all our thoughts, then we have the “sword of the Spirit” that can be used to ward off any temptation, defeat any sorrow, and aid any brother or sister in their battles with life.

Watching for the coming of Christ

The true purpose of putting on this “whole armor of God” is spelled out in verse

18: i.e., so that we are prepared for “watching”. Here the Greek word means literally to “be sleepless, or to keep awake”. It is the same form of the Greek word used by our Lord Jesus Christ (Matt 25:13; Luke 21:36) in warning us always to be prepared for the day of his coming. No one knows the day, the hour or even the second that one’s life may be snatched away. But this we can be assured of: the very next thing we will be aware of after our death will be the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and our required presence at his judgment seat. Thus the admonition that Jesus gives to “watch therefore” is the same that any diligent commander would give his watchmen. We need to stay awake and be vigilant, for we “know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh”.

John C. Bilello (Ann Arbor, MI)

Notes:

1. The Roman mile is used here, which was 1,000 paces of a legionnaire, approximately equivalent to 4,854 feet.
2. A cohort was the basic fighting unit of the Roman Army. It was composed of 480 men and six centurion officers and was commanded by a Tribune. Ten cohorts would comprise one legion.
3. Watch, watched, watcher, watchers, watches, watcheth, watchful, watching, watchings, watchman, watchman’s, watchmen, and watchtower.
4. Strong’s number 6822.
5. See also Isaiah 21:6,11,12.
6. Strong’s number 8104.
7. Typically 24 miles in a day with a backpack weighing approximately 70 pounds.

The Roads of Rome

*“All roads lead to Rome, it was said. They spread out from Rome too and ran to the remotest frontiers: they were the veins that kept the blood in circulation. They ran through deserts and over mountains; they crossed the passes of the Alps and the snow-clad mountains of Asia Minor. Strategic considerations and care for trade communications determined their direction. Impressive engineering skill was employed in making them. They lay so deeply and solidly fixed in the earth that they resembled more than anything a wall with a road on the top. They can still be found in all the countries over which Rome ruled: they seem to have been built for all eternity. They were long and even, with gently rounded curves. Where modern roads in England have been made over them motorists enjoy driving: their straightness allows car to run at their top speed. When, in 1850, a French general climbed with his troops over a pass in the Atlas Mountains, he held it for a tremendous achievement and thought he was the first who had dared to cross those impassable heights. But then he found an inscription on a rock showing that the Third Legion had made a road there!” (Poul Borchsenius, *History of the Jews: The Son of a Star*, p. 80).*

Music in Worship

Bro. C.C. Walker and his Hymns

Charles Curwen Walker (“C.C.”, as he came to be known in Christadelphian circles) was born in 1856 in Norfolk, England. When he was 13 he went with his father to Australia. In 1880 he returned to England to deal with the estate of a deceased relative. While he was in London, he was sent copies of the “Declaration” and the “Bible Companion” by a relative. He was also given a copy of Robert Roberts’ “Town Hall Lectures”. Before he left London to return to Australia, he bought various publications to read on his voyage.

While traveling back to Australia, he made a close study of *Twelve Lectures* (now known as *Christendom Astray*). All this led him to make a solemn declaration: “If it shall please God to bring me to Melbourne and allow me to be baptised into the name of Jesus Christ, I will thereafter devote myself entirely and exclusively to His service. Amen.” At this point in his life he had grasped the truth concerning the mortality of man and the relationship between God and His Son Jesus, before he ever met with any Australian Christadelphians. So he was baptized without delay in Melbourne in 1882, at the age of 25.

He proposed marriage to Sis. Edith Sutcliffe of England, and she sailed to Australia with her sister Ellen. When Bro. Roberts invited him to Birmingham to help with the production of the Christadelphian Magazine, he accepted.

Bro. Robert Roberts put C.C. Walker in charge of a section of the magazine called “The Jews and their Affairs”. In 1891 C.C. Walker became assistant editor of the Christadelphian Magazine. In 1897 he became joint editor with Bro. Frank Shuttleworth when the Roberts family sailed to Australia.

The following year Robert Roberts died in San Francisco. C.C. Walker left Frank Shuttleworth in charge while he went to New York to superintend the funeral and the settlement of the estate. On his return he took over as sole editor and publisher of the writings of Bre. Thomas and Roberts.

The publishing business was located in his own house at No. 21 Hendon Road, Sparkhill. He completed the writing of *The Ministry of the Prophets: Isaiah*, which had been begun by Bro. Roberts. He also produced a number of books and booklets, including:

- *The Old Testament Doctrine of Eternal Life* (1906)
- *Theophany* (1929)
- *Jeremiah* (1934)
- *Rome and the Christadelphians* (1923)
- *Thoughts on Inspiration* (1934)
- *Job* (1935)

- *Christ and War* (1939)
- *Notes on the Apocalypse*

C.C. Walker wrote three hymns that first appeared in the 1932 hymnbook. One is Hymn 228 in the current (2002) hymnbook entitled “Deck thyself, my soul, with gladness”. This hymn is based on some of the words written by Johann Frank, a German hymn writer, words that were subsequently translated into English by Catherine Winkworth. Following are the words of the first stanza of this hymn written by Johann Frank, of which some lines were used by C.C. Walker:

*Deck thyself, my soul, with gladness,
Leave the gloomy haunts of sadness,
Come into the daylight's splendour.
There with joy thy praises render
Unto Him whose grace unbounded
Hath this wondrous banquet founded,
High o'er all the heav'ns He reigneth,
Yet to dwell with thee He deigneth.*

Johann Cruger wrote the hymn music for “Deck thyself, my soul, with gladness” in 1649. This chorale was adopted by J.S. Bach and used in his cantata “Deck yourself, my soul, with gladness”.

C.C. Walker also wrote the words for Hymn 382 in our current hymnbook, “The evening and morning we see the Lord making”. This is set to music by his friend Bro. Harold M. Williams, using a tune from a Mendelssohn sonata.

A third hymn for which C.C. Walker wrote the words is Hymn 303, “See the Lamb upon Mount Zion”. These words are set to a Mendelssohn tune from the cantata “Lord, how long wilt Thou forget me?”

*(Taken from **Some Past Christadelphian Hymn Writers and Composers**, pp. 26,27, Stuart Cowlshaw, with revisions by Joan and Ken Curry)*

Our Purpose in Singing Hymns

Many hymns and religious songs are sung for commercial purposes, in ignorance of the one true God. To hear *The Hallelujah Chorus* played over the public address system in a shopping mall borders on blasphemy. Likewise, to hear it used in television to promote discovery of a new product is sacrilege.

As disciples of the Lord, we need to consider carefully why we sing our hymns — what is our purpose, what is the intent of the words we sing. Hymns are an opportunity for worship, praise and meditation. There is no room for carelessness.

In our hymns:

- It is the great God of heaven we are addressing;

- It is the Son of God we are remembering;
- It is our fellow disciples we are encouraging; and
- It is ourselves we are dedicating to the Lord.

May God be pleased with our meditations and our music.

The chart below gives an outline of the design and purpose of some of our hymns.

Ken Curry (Toronto East, ON)

THE DESIGN AND PURPOSE OF OUR HYMNS

Hymns sung to GOD:

Adoration - Hymn 117 "Praise, O praise our God and King"

Praise - Hymn 75 "O Praise ye the Lord"

Thanksgiving - Hymn 105 "Now thank we all our God"

Worship - Hymn 159 "O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness"

Petition - Hymn 152 "Lord, when we bend before Thy throne"

Hymns sung to JESUS:

Acknowledgement - Hymn 218 "Loving Shepherd of thy sheep"

Thanksgiving - Hymn 240 "Saviour, we meet in thy dear name"

Remembrance - Hymn 224 "According to thy gracious word"

Praise - Hymn 291 "Crown him with many crowns"

His Return - Hymn 265 "How long, O Lord our Saviour"

Hymns sung to Fellow Disciples:

Encouragement - Hymn 355 "Soldiers of Christ, arise"

Exhortation - Hymn 361 "Ye saints in Christ, his brethren"

Reminders - Hymn 62 "All they who in the Lord confide"

Hymns sung to encourage Ourselves:

Meditation - Hymn 146 "Hushed was the evening hymn"

Dedication - Hymn 163 "Take my life and let it be"

Reflection - Hymn 330 "I heard the voice of Jesus say"

Confession - Hymn 36 "If I regard iniquity in my heart"

“Then The Seven Angels Who Had The Seven Trumpets Prepared To Sound Them” (Revelation 8:6)

The book of Revelation is an extremely complex book to understand, full of symbols that may seem difficult to interpret. Yet it is a book that richly repays careful study and that can become fascinating and very absorbing. Take the seven trumpets for instance.

In Old Testament prophecy, trumpets warn of God's judgments about to fall on nations that have rejected or that oppose Him. For example, Jeremiah 4:5 warns, *“Declare ye in Judah, and publish in Jerusalem; and say, Blow ye the trumpet in the land: cry, gather together, and say, Assemble yourselves, and let us go into the defended cities.”*

Also in Joel 2:1:

“Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain: let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the day of the Lord cometh, for it is nigh at hand...” (see also Zeph 1:16).

Notably similar language is used of the fall of Babylon in Jeremiah 51:27:

“Set ye up a standard in the land, blow the trumpet among the nations, prepare the nations against her...”

As for Israel, if they would only repent, they might avert disaster from the sword of the enemy. But the warnings were generally unheeded:

“If when he seeth the sword come upon the land, he blow the trumpet, and warn the people; then whosoever heareth the sound of the trumpet, and taketh not warning; if the sword come, and take him away, his blood shall be upon his own head. He heard the sound of the trumpet, and took not warning... But he that taketh warning shall deliver his soul” (Ezek 33:3-5).

The prophet's pleadings did not usually bring about repentance in the nation of Israel:

“Also I set watchmen over you, saying, Hearken to the sound of the trumpet. But they said, We will not hearken” (Jer 6:17).

Trumpets were used by Israel during times of invasion and destruction of their enemies' territory. When the nation of Israel entered the land of Canaan and the city of Jericho was about to be destroyed by the Lord, seven priests blowing seven trumpets (accompanied by the ark of the Lord) made a loud noise while circling the city. The people of Jericho must have wondered what the significance of this procession was. When they found out, it was too late for their deliverance.

Trumpets were also used in times of rejoicing. During the time of King David, when the ark of the covenant was brought to the city of David from the house of Obed-Edom, “priests did blow with the trumpets before the ark of God...” (1Ch 15:24). After the exiles had returned to Jerusalem and were celebrating the dedication of the wall, “the Levites were sought out from where they lived and were brought to Jerusalem to celebrate joyfully the dedication with songs of thanksgiving and with the music of cymbals, harps and lyres... as well as the

priests... with their trumpets” (Neh 12:27,41).

In the Book of Psalms, trumpets were used as instruments to praise God for His sovereign majesty:

“Shout for joy to the Lord all the earth, burst into jubilant song with music; make music to the Lord with the harp, with the harp and the sound of singing, with trumpets and the blast of the ram’s horn” (Psa 98:4-6).

With this background in the Old Testament, the Book of Revelation proclaims judgment on the enemies of God and ultimate deliverance of His people. This gives hope and encouragement to the followers of Jesus when they are suffering persecution at the hands of wicked and powerful men. The first six trumpets in Revelation introduce calamities falling on various regions of the earth or groups of people. The sounding of the seventh trumpet is followed by the proclamation of God’s Kingdom, and the worship of God as Sovereign.

Thus the “last trump” heralds the return of the Lord Jesus and the resurrection of the dead (exactly what is described in connection with the seventh trumpet in Revelation):

“And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds... we shall be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised... For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God...” (Matt 24:31; 1Co 15:51,52; 1Th 4:16).

There is a rich and varied Scriptural background to the use of trumpets: they are used to warn of judgment, to summon to repentance, to escort the ark, to proclaim Divine sovereignty, and to give thanks to God. The promise of participating in God’s Kingdom and glory, and all that is implied in the events surrounding “the last trump”, is a very great source of strength for God’s people.

Bob Burr (Barnt Green, Birmingham, UK)

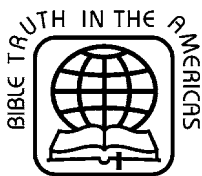
“Shine! Biblical Songs for Kids”

A new CD album specifically produced for Christadelphian children is now available. This double CD set is entitled **“Shine! Biblical Songs for Kids”**. It has been produced by Sis. Alison Creighton (Castle Hill, AU) and Bro. Daniel Stewart (Shaftsbury Road, AU). **“Shine!”** includes 21 original Biblical children’s songs (written by Alison and Daniel) on CD 1; instrumental / sing-a-long versions of selected songs on CD 2; and a CD ROM Music and Activity Book on CD 2.

“Shine!” was produced to:

- Provide children with music that is fun to sing **and** has a Biblical content.
- Provide new Sunday school songs with easy-to-understand lyrics.
- Provide Sunday schools with recorded songs that only require a CD player.

Further information about **“Shine!”** (with audio samples of the songs) is available from ***www.shinecd.com***



Bible Mission News

Four Months in Quito, Ecuador

Since returning to Ecuador after our one-year break in Canada, four months have already flashed by. Where did that time go?

Over these months we have gotten ourselves settled back into our ecclesial routines here. As December moves into January, we are in the process of reactivating the postal work with a year-end advertising blitz. The big difference between this time and previous times is that one of our local brethren is helping in dealing with the newspapers, negotiating the best rates, fielding the calls coming in from correspondence students, and then hand-delivering the first lessons to people with obscure addresses. Also, once we have the first group ready to get going, we plan to train one of our recently baptized (but long-attending) sisters to take on the new postal students for the country, working with our online contact database. This is as exciting for us as it is for the ecclesia itself, since it should help them become more hands-on with the local preaching.

During the year we were away, we had to put the postal course work on hold, because no one was ready to take it on. Consequently we're rather thin on new visitors right now. The way we've always worked here is by advertising regularly for new students, which in turn provides a steady stream of ecclesial attendees. (It seems to take a few years for the momentum for normal ecclesial growth, through friends, family, and acquaintances, to develop.) So far (writing in the first days of January) the ads we have placed haven't produced the results that we had when we first came to Ecuador. However, this might be a blessing in disguise, in that the volunteers are not being overwhelmed. December has always been a tough time to advertise, people's minds being on other matters.

In the ecclesia we currently have two midweek classes:

1. a first principles class (currently considering the promises to David) in the home of Sis. Ana, in the south, on Tuesday evenings; and
2. a Genesis class (currently at chapter 4) in the home of Sis. Lucia, in the north, on Friday evenings.

The midweek Bible class at the hall continues, with the regular attendance of a group of retired brothers and sisters, who make up the majority of our ecclesial group. In Bible Class we are wrapping up a multi-week series on the role of sisters in the ecclesia. In January we hope to begin a series of first principles debates, with the goal of helping the brothers and sisters develop more confidence and skill to witness effectively to their beliefs.

On Sundays we continue to have solid attendance from the brothers and sisters and several long-term contacts, both at the breaking of bread and the public lecture/Sunday school that follows. This last Sunday our exhortation was about Cain and Abel, and how we may not be so very different from Cain. If God asked us about *our* brother or sister, would we truly know where they are, in a spiritual and personal, not geographical, sense? Or do we merely go about our business and expect that someone else will take care of that aspect of ecclesial life? In new ecclesias, where all our members come from unrelated backgrounds, it takes constant work and reminders to help everyone see the importance of strong relationships with their brothers and sisters.

In the public lectures we finished a lengthy study of Acts a few weeks ago. During the last five weeks of the year we have been doing an exciting study of Esther; this has everyone caught up in the drama of Haman and his nefarious plots. It's a wonderful privilege to lead a group of relative neophytes through a study such as Esther, in an environment where many people are still captured by the wonders of good literature and great storytelling. Esther is truly a masterpiece in that sense; when we ended one lecture just as Haman was being called to the second banquet, the collective groan of the audience, sitting on the edge of their seats, was music to my ears.

We have lots of ongoing pastoral work to keep us occupied. One of our older brothers (Augusto Echeverría, about 85 years old) has had some issues with his vision but is otherwise strong as an ox. He is beginning "Mutual Improvement" classes to work himself into the exhortation schedule. He's eager to participate, after having spent decades wandering from church to church until he found us. It will be wonderful to have his contributions on Sundays, since the brothers are maxed out with presiding, exhorting, and lecturing, and we can always use more help. Recently we have had a few brothers out due to sickness and work schedules, and we have been hurting for replacements. It is often Kevin who has to fill in due to the sheer lack of numbers.

The women's class seems to be doing well with our new study of Philippians. We have been doing independent study and discussing in group-style workshops, using the Manitoulin Youth Conference workbook on Philippians (translated into Spanish). It has been hugely beneficial already in encouraging independent study and sharing of ideas. The material focuses on fostering a healthy ecclesial atmosphere and spiritual growth, exactly what we all need at the moment. Philippians is such an excellent book for that purpose.

On November 25, we all participated in the annual Run for the Everlasting Cure. We had a great turnout early Saturday morning — meeting in the local version of Central Park, Parque Carolina, where we've held the run in past years. It was a cool morning with huge black rain clouds, but the rain held off for us. By the end, the sun was out and warming us all up. We began with a special prayer, for everyone we knew here locally who was suffering from cancer — along with all those for whom we were praying collectively, worldwide, with other ecclesias. It was sad to think that last year we had been praying for the recovery of Sis. Alejandra (from El

Salvador), and this year we were praying that her family continue to find strength in our hope now that she has passed away. However, we were heartened to hear about Sis. Sarah Culver's excellent status. We continued with prayers for her and her family, as well as several other brothers and sisters, both locally and abroad. We also prayed for the soon return of Jesus, and the fulfillment of our hope. Following the prayer, we ran our five kilometers — with the kids all winning prizes, and shared in a picnic together under the trees. This year we managed to get the T-shirts done at the last minute, so we all proudly wore our run T-shirts with the RFTEC logo and the verse from Isaiah in Spanish! As our baptized are mostly older, hopefully they won't be growing any more, and can continue to use their shirts for the runs to come, if Jesus remains away.

In other exciting news, we also had our biannual fall hall clean. The place that we rent for a hall is quite old and falling apart, so it makes for an all-day affair. We have been keeping an eye out for something smaller to rent, but so far haven't had anything come up in the area.

And finally, a couple of weeks ago our Bro. Jorge and Sis. Carmen (husband and wife) left to attend the El Salvador year-end gathering. Each year two members of this ecclesia go up to El Salvador to fellowship with a mature ecclesia that shares their language and culture, and each year whoever goes comes back completely energized by the experience. It is a great infusion of positive spiritual energy for everyone. Jorge and Carmen are both retired and have time to spare. They took advantage of the fact their flight goes through Costa Rica, by stopping off there to attend Costa Rica's year-end fraternal as well, before returning.

May God richly bless our brothers and sisters around the world as we patiently wait for our Lord's return.

Bro. Kevin and Sis. Rebekah Hunter (Quito, Ecuador)

Jamaica, December 2007

The Christadelphian Bible Mission of Jamaica has been encouraging and supporting the activities of ecclesias in Jamaica for a number of years. Every three months the CBMJ gathers to plan and review ecclesial life in Jamaica. One such meeting was held on October 6. Members from twelve ecclesias attended. The year-end Bible school was planned. A fraternal in October was discussed. Exciting news of the four baptisms at the Round Hill Ecclesia was shared. After the meeting, we learned there have now been ten baptisms in Jamaica in 2007, for which we thank God.

Jamaica is a land where willing workers have been preaching the Truth for many years. Teams of young people have visited and spread the Good News of the Kingdom to eager listeners. God willing, those activities will continue in 2008 with visits already planned for parts of the country.

The CBMJ and the CBMA and CBMC of North America have tried to provide care and encouragement as needed. In the attached photo three of those willing

workers are shown. Bre. Martin Shirley, Mark Patterson and Ray Arthurs (right) have been zealous helpers in Jamaica. Bro. Martin travels far and wide throughout Jamaica to help those of our ecclesial family in their times of need. Bro. Ray, the CBMJ Treasurer, facilitates the support agreed upon with Bro. Martin. Beside the pastoral support, the brothers are among those in Jamaica who rightly divide the Word of Truth to all who will hear and respond. Bro. Mark has been the Link Brother for Jamaica for a number of years, tirelessly encouraging the CBMJ brethren and all ecclesias and young people in the Truth. As Bro. Mark has retired from these duties, we thank him on behalf of all in Jamaica who have come to know and love their brother for his care of them.



The second photo is the memorial meeting at Harvey River held in October. This ecclesia of seven members is perched on the side of a hill at the northwest end of the country. It has been a lampstand for the Truth over many years. We pray that the efforts of our brothers and sisters at Harvey River and throughout Jamaica will bring glory to God in all they do.

Rod Ghent (Toronto West, ON)

Wedding in Bolivia

In the very heart of this predominantly Catholic country is the predominantly Catholic capital. Not long ago, in this city, a young brother and a young sister, both from Catholic families, united their hearts in marriage before God. It was the first Christadelphian wedding the country has ever witnessed, and they became in fact the first South American couple to be married as Christadelphians.

La Paz, Bolivia — December 15, 2007. It is 7 pm. The light is beginning to fade outside, and the lightstand within the hired non-denominational church is beginning to burn brightly. As requested by the bride, the pianist is playing Christadelphian hymns. Wedding programs, not customary here, have been specially prepared by the bride and groom as a way of witnessing to their shared faith; brothers and friends from the small ecclesia are handing them out. Bro. Jacob Styles is preparing to perform his first marriage service in Spanish.

How does one go about preparing for a Christadelphian wedding in a country where every mother's dream is to see her daughter walk down the aisle to the notes of "Ave Maria"? The courage and faith of Bro. Martín and Sis. Laura in preparing for their marriage, in the midst of many pressures, has been heartening. The journey has not been an easy one.

Gradually the church fills and tension grows among the guests, who are mostly Catholic. Jacob and Bro. Hugo Petrilli, who has come especially from Argentina to take part in this service, take their places on the stage. The moment has arrived. Martín walks down the aisle with his mother, followed by his father and Laura's mother. Next come the bridesmaids, pageboy and flower girls. The music changes to "O God Beyond All Praising", and the bride appears, radiant in white. Laura and her father begin their walk down the aisle.

Some eight years before this day, Martín and Laura had been introduced by a mutual friend at a Catholic youth camp. They began dating not long afterwards and continued with their circle of Catholic friends, even attending Catholic marriage preparation classes. However, their lives were soon to be set on a very different course. First, Laura met Bro. Mark and Sis. Anne McKenzie (Sydney, AU) when they adopted Lizzy, a child from Laura's workplace. She visited them in Australia and was impressed with their lives of faith as Christadelphians. Back in Bolivia, just when she needed it, she saw a newspaper ad offering Bible study, from the very same "strange" group. She and Martín took the correspondence course, and then

continued their studies with a Christadelphian missionary couple, Bro. Steve and Sis. Sally Jefferies (Pershore, UK). This led to their baptisms, together, on February 18, 2006. All these events had brought them at last to this moment.

Martín receives Laura from her father, and the marriage ceremony begins. Jacob speaks on the principles of godly marriage, its meaning for the husband and wife, and its practical importance. During the ceremony Hugo reads 1 Corinthians 13, as well as a letter from Bro. Don Luff on behalf of the CBMA and Christadelphians worldwide. Sis. Fiona Styles sings a traditional wedding hymn, “Maker of All Things”, translated into Spanish, as well as a song prepared especially for the bride and groom. Hugo and Jacob offer prayers. All witness the vows made by Martín and Laura in the hearing of Almighty God.

Then the service is finished. It is completely dark outside. The bride and groom leave the church, but they are not walking in darkness. Already betrothed to Christ in their respective baptisms, they are now united in marriage, the lovely symbol of Christ’s spiritual union with his Bride. They face their future together, placing themselves in the hands of God, who has already blessed them so greatly. Though surrounded by darkness both literal and spiritual, they walk in light — their hearts knit together in love, and bound together with their spiritual family throughout the world.

Our hearts and prayers are with Martín and Laura as they walk together to the Kingdom of God. May the time come soon when we all meet at the marriage supper of the Lamb:

“After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb” (Rev 7:9,10).

Jacob and Fiona Styles



A Note of Thanks

Dear brothers and sisters, our spiritual family all over the world!

We want to take this opportunity to thank you all for the kind words, letters, cards, and prayers!

It was wonderful to be surprised in such an amazing way by so many cards and good wishes from people we don't know, from friends we met a while ago, and from the big spiritual family we realize we have, who made us feel so loved in such a special way. We really appreciate your kindness.

As Paul said to the Ephesian Ecclesia (Eph 2:19), we feel no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household.

*Sincerely yours,
Martín and Laura*

Thisisyourbible.com Website

December numbers were again down in most categories, as we might expect for this time of the year. The number of new students continues to stay relatively constant at **451** in December, and the total for the year at **6,181** is about **25%** higher than we predicted at the beginning of the year.

Our feature question was: "Is it possible to communicate with the dead?" The question was answered by **924** people — the second highest number of respondents we've ever had. Below you can see the various choices for response, and how the question was answered:

Is it possible to communicate with the dead?

- Yes. The spirit lives on after death and is conscious. It is okay to talk to the dead. 105
- No. The soul goes to heaven or hell at death and cannot communicate with the living. 263
- No. The dead are unconscious in the grave until the resurrection. 312
- Yes, it is possible, but it is wrong to try to do so. 116
- Don't know. 128
- **Total Responses** 924

In addition, the pamphlet associated with the question of "Spiritualism", that normally draws about 56 readers per month, drew **654** in December.

We are in the final stages of revamping the TIYB website; so keep checking the site to see the new look and to find out more about what's going on there.

Want to help?

- Visit the website and find out what it's all about (www.thisisyourbible.com)
- Become an on-line tutor; you can see from above that we need your help!
- Hand out the business cards available in your ecclesia — let us know if you need more

- Advertise the website in your local newspaper or as a link on your ecclesia's website
- Continue your CBMA / CBMC financial support either individually or as an ecclesia

An Urgent Appeal for Resident Missionaries

The CBMA has an immediate need for missionary couples in Latin America. The response to the Truth in several countries is extremely encouraging. There have been a number of baptisms in recent years — 28 in 2006 and 11 in 2007 — with contacts in various countries currently preparing for baptism. There are over 9,000 contacts on the database and 1,500 of these are active. Other than correspondence work (postal or internet), regular visits and short-term preaching efforts, one of the essential components of establishing strong ecclesias is the presence of resident missionaries.

There are current needs in the following two areas:

Mexico

Bro. Carl and Sis. Cynthia Paiva have been working in Guadalajara since 2003; their labors have resulted in 12 baptisms. There are also a number of interested friends who attend on a regular basis. The Paivas are coming to the end of their commitment, although there is still a need for continued support and guidance as the ecclesia matures. The potential for future growth is also very encouraging, with God's blessing.

South America

The pace of preaching activities has increased considerably in South America in recent years, in such countries as Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador and Peru. However, by the middle of 2007 there will only be one missionary couple in South America. There is an immediate need for at least one missionary couple to prepare to serve in one of these countries.

Some requirements: Spanish language abilities would be an asset, but not essential: training would be provided. A commitment of up to three years would be preferred. The CBMA provides many forms of assistance for full-time, resident missionaries.

More information needed? For more information about these opportunities to serve, please contact the following brethren:

Ken Sommerville, Chairman
 CBMA Council
 19111 Kinzie St.
 Northridge, CA 91324
 USA
 1-818-341-3932
kenandbonnie@simihills.org
ksommerville@unitedagencies.com

Don Luff, Chairman
 CBMA Latin American Comm.
 11 Vera Court
 Brantford, ON N3R 3B5
 Canada
 1-519-756-2682
luffs@sympatico.ca

Addresses for Bequests and Donations

(For tax ID numbers please contact the Editor)

Christadelphian Bible Mission of the Americas (CBMA) supports preaching work throughout the Americas, Domestic Truth Corps, etc. Visit www.cbma.net for an update on current activities as well as to make US dollar online donations. Donations by check should be sent c/o Charles Brinkerhoff, 15925 La Ronda Cir., Hacienda Heights, CA 91745-4244.

Christadelphian Save the Children Fund provides Bible learning materials, personal items, and scholarships to needy mission areas. For details see: www.christadelphianchildren.com

Christadelphian Tidings Publishing Committee publishes this magazine and other works on the truth. P.O. Box 530696, Livonia, MI 48153-0696.

CBMA Overseas Book Service welcomes gifts of used Bibles, reference books, and Christadelphian books. Please contact Jan Berneau, 1221 N. Whitnall Hwy., Burbank, CA 91505-2110.
Phone: 818-842-2868
jberneau@earthlink.net

Christadelphian Indian Children's Homes (CICH) donations in US dollars can be sent to CICH, c/o David & Connie Stiles, 3 Blue Acre Rd., Middletown, CT 06457-5012.

Christadelphian Heritage College Donations may be sent to Christadelphian Heritage College, c/o Brantford Ecclesia, 442 Dunsdon St., Brantford, ON, Canada, N3P 2B1

Karolyn Andrews Memorial Fund (KAMF) provides help in cases where brethren or families have been victims of persecution because of their faith. Checks in any currency to KAMF, c/o P.O. Box 87371, Canton, MI 48187-0371.

Joy Fund, Inc., provides grants to ecclesias, individuals, and families to assist with basic needs. c/o Stan Newton, 6861 Skyview Dr., Huntington Beach, CA 92647-2938.

Christadelphian Bible Mission Canada (CBMC) supports preaching work throughout the Caribbean and bequests for similar activity. Visit www.cbma.net for an update on current activities as well as to make Canadian dollar online donations. Donations by cheque should be sent to Box 55541, Unit 119, 15280 101 Ave., Surrey, BC, Canada, V3R 0J7

Williamsburg Christadelphian Foundation (WCF) supports pastoral and preaching activities throughout the world. c/o Ray Pratt, P.O. Box 86, Deland, IL 61839-0086. Website: wcfoundation.org

Christadelphian Tape Library. Contact Reuben E. Washington, 196 E. Stearns St., Rahway, NJ 07065-4923.
Phone: 732-381-4590
Fax: 732-499-8415
christadelphiantapelibrary@verizon.net

Fairhaven Christadelphian Charitable Foundation provides assistance to Canadian ecclesias dealing with the health and welfare issues of senior members. Donations can be sent c/o Clive Daniel, 8583 Sansum Park Drive, North Saanich, BC, V8L4V7, Canada.

Spanish language literature is available at P.O. Box 947, Monrovia, CA 91017-0947.
jdhunter@gte.net, 626-303-2222

Christadelphian Care-Line provides a service for those who need fully confidential help with emotional and spiritual problems as well as family issues. 866-823-1039

Alcohol Help Line provides a service for those who need fully confidential help overcoming alcohol dependency. 866-823-1039

Anderson Family Support Fund provides help for Bro. Grant Anderson's family after Grant's serious car accident. Mail checks payable to Christadelphians to: P.O. Box 530696, Livonia, MI 48153-0696. Website: www.milfordroad.net/Andersons.html

News & Notices

BRANTFORD, ON

We are happy to extend a warm welcome to Sis. Hadassah Mindorff by way of transfer from the Niagara Ecclesia as of December 23, 2007. We look forward to continued fellowship with her as we labor together in the truth.

God willing, our Senior CYC Gathering is to be held on February 16, 2007. Bro. Ken Styles (Royal Oak, MI) is to speak on the theme of “Be ye Holy, for I am Holy.”

Daniel Billington

GUATEMALA CITY, GUATEMALA

With sadness we report the falling asleep of Bro. Carlos Hernandez on November 8, 2007. Bro. Carlos was baptized in 1999, becoming one of the first members of the small ecclesia in Guatemala. Despite losing his sight in later years, he maintained an enthusiastic attitude and was a strong example to others in his desire to preach the truth. Turning a handicap into a strength, Bro. Carlos handed out leaflets to others while riding the public transportation system for free. He now awaits that great day when “the eyes of the blind shall be opened.” In a small meeting with only six active members, this loss is especially difficult. We ask for the brotherhood’s prayers for the brethren in Guatemala, for comfort in their loss and for strength in their continued efforts to shine forth the light of the gospel.

Dan Robinson, Linkman

HONESDALE, PA

It is with heavy hearts we must report the falling asleep of two members of the Honesdale Ecclesia: Sis. Betty Garing on November 20, 2007, and Bro. Kenneth Dunn on December 5, 2007. They will be greatly missed but the families feel a sense of relief, because both had been in a nursing home for several years. We take comfort that we will see them soon when our Lord returns to establish the Kingdom.

Gerald Frisbie

MISSISSAUGA WEST, ON

We rejoiced in the following marriages: Bro. Paul Cadieux to Sis. Jasmine Ortiz (Pomona, CA) in March 2007; Sis. Ashley Wilkins to Bro. Casey Caronna (Olympia, WA) in September 2007; Bro. Neil Carr to Sis. Sarah Luff (Hamilton MacNab, ON) in November 2007. We pray for God’s blessing on these couples as they walk together toward Zion.

We were blessed with the birth of two baby girls. Olivia Katelyn was born to Bro. Robert and Sis. Candice Cooper in April 2007; and Madison Gillian was born to Bro. Jason and Sis. Amanda Longley in September 2007.

We have had a number of transfers: Bro. Paul Cadieux to the Pomona, CA, Ecclesia; Bro. Dan and Sis. Maribel Archibald to the Toronto East Ecclesia; and Bro. Neil Carr to the Hamilton MacNab Ecclesia. We commend these members in love to the brothers and sisters in their new ecclesias.

Our ecclesia benefited from fellowship shared with Bro. Ian and Sis. Judy MacFarlane

(Hamilton Ewen Road, ON) in November 2007, at our annual study weekend. We thank Bro. Ian for his ministrations on the subject of "The Mind of the Spirit".

We enjoy the fellowship of a number of brothers and sisters who are visiting our ecclesia from abroad for an extended period: Sis. Sarah Luxmore (Pakuranga, NZ) visiting for a year; Bro. Paul and Sis. Mary Jane Styles (Livonia, MI) who are in the area for a number of months; and Bro. Ben and Sis. Rosemary Saxon and family (Adelaide, Aust.) who have transferred their membership for the two years that they are here.

It is our collective prayer that 2008 will be the year in which our absent Lord returns.

Doug Jackson

RALEIGH/CARY, NC

We are grateful for the many visiting brothers and sisters, whom have come to fellowship with us around our Lord's table this past year: Bro. Paul and Sis. Donna Gaitanis and two sons, Daniel and Steven, and Bro. Ryan King (Petersburg, VA); Bro. Bob and Sis. Norley Kling, and Bro. Andrew Fraser (Washington, DC); Sis. Jenny Berry (Austin Leander, TX); and Bro. Jack and Sis. Shirley Robinson (Kitchener-Waterloo, ON).

With great joy we announce the marriage of Bro. Stanley Gergle to Sis. Zensi Dakota from Hungary, in June 2007. They are presently residing as members at the South Florida (Pompano Beach) Ecclesia. We pray that God will bless them in their newly united walk to His Kingdom.

On November 3, 4, 2007, our small ecclesia held a gathering for our members and visiting contacts. Bro. Ryan King was our speaker. We certainly appreciated his inspiring words, and we all had a wonderful time.

Two of our contacts have been with us now for about one and a half years. They are young students, are very enthusiastic about the word of God, and would love to have the support and inspiring words of believers who might be stopping by for a visit every now and then. We warmly invite all traveling through North Carolina, or who will be transferring for school or employment, to stop in and meet with the Raleigh/Cary Ecclesia. We are located just off I-40. Breaking of bread and Thursday classes are held in homes and coffee shops around town, so please contact Bro. Greg Gergle at 919-219-5907 for times and locations. A special thanks to Bro. Reuben Washington for the Hymn CDs. We indeed have found our voices.

We look forward to many future visits from our family in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Greg Gergle

SEATTLE, WA

With great joy we announce the weddings of Bro. Dave Jahns to Sis. Wendy Minchez on February 24, 2007; Bro. Robbie Posey to Sis. Elizabeth Jahns on March 3, 2007; and Bro. Dan Bleichner to Sis. Lindsay Buresh on May 12, 2007. We pray for our heavenly Father's richest blessing upon them as they walk together as one to His kingdom. Following their marriage, our Sis. Elizabeth Posey has transferred her membership to the Grants Pass, OR, Ecclesia. We miss her very much but commend her in love to the brothers and sisters in Grants Pass.

We rejoice also with our Bro. Kent and Sis. Lorraine Beeson in the baptism of their

daughter, ERIN BEESON, on September 9, 2007. May God bless her and keep her on her walk to His Kingdom.

We rejoice also with our Bro. Paul and Sis. Susan Skinner in the birth of their third child, Benjamin Michael Skinner, on July 15, 2007. We pray for God's blessing on Benjamin that he might grow up in the love and admonition of the Lord.

It is with sadness that we announce the falling asleep in Christ of our Bro. Kashindi Ikola. He passed away at age 77 after an extended illness. Bro. Kashindi moved to Seattle after a short stay in Spokane, WA, from the Lugufu Ecclesia, Tanzania, Africa. He brought with him his sister wife, Sifa, along with three sons, a daughter-in-law, and five grandchildren. It was source of great pleasure for him to see his family fully integrated into the Seattle Ecclesia before he fell asleep in Christ. Our faithful brother now sleeps, awaiting the call of our Lord at the resurrection.

We are also saddened to announce the passing of Ezekiel Timothy Bruce on October 21, 2007. Ezekiel was the infant son born to Bro. Tim and Sis. Tabea Bruce on September 24, 2007. We pray for a special portion of strength, courage and faith for our brother and sister from our heavenly Father as they mourn their loss. We long for that time when "there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away." "Even so come Lord Jesus."

Finally, due to the growth of our ecclesia in recent years, we now meet in a new location for Sunday memorial service. We now meet at 11:00 am at Edmonds Home School Resource Center, 23200 100th Avenue, Edmonds, WA 98020. Visitors should feel free to contact the undersigned for directions if needed.

Tony Ball

VERNON, BC

We are pleased to welcome, by transfer from the Okanagan Central Ecclesia, our Sis. Karen Erickson. She, along with her husband Monte and young son David, are welcome additions to our Sunday school and ecclesial activities. Both Sis. Karen and Monte have recently returned from Ethiopia where they were able to bring home their chosen daughter, Elshaday Makeda, who was born in October of 2006. We are thankful that our Father has seen fit to place this little girl in their home, where she might grow and learn of the things of God.

As mentioned in a previous issue of *The Tidings*, our Bro. Dean and Sis. Andrea Bailey and daughters moved to Ontario during the summer, and we commend them to the care of the Cambridge, ON, Ecclesia. We wish God's blessings for them in their new ecclesial home.

We are saddened to announce the falling asleep in Christ of our Bro. Al Green on November 28, 2007. Our brother, aged 85, had spent many years in the truth and now sleeps in the hope of the Kingdom that he so yearned for.

We have enjoyed the fellowship of many visitors over the past few months, and in particular, the frequent visits of Bro. David Barrett of the New Westminster Ecclesia. Bro. David's work brings him to our area every second weekend, and we appreciate his efforts to come and break bread with us.

David Zantingh

WICHITA FALLS, TX

Since last reporting our ecclesial news we have welcomed around the table of our absent Lord the following brothers and sisters: Sis. Judy Muniz (Livonia, MI); Bro. Bill and Sis. Kelli Ellison, and Bro. Andrew Ellison (Westerly, RI); Bro. Max and Sis. Linda Wickham (San Diego County, CA); Sis. Erin Rakich (Simi Hills, CA); Bro. Landon Wolfe, Bro. Levi Wolfe, Bro. Jeremy and Sis. Leah Wolfe (Abilene, TX); Sis. Michele Massip, Bro. Antonio and Sis. Marcia Howell, and Sis. Jeanna McLaughlin (Dallas, TX); Bro. Ralph and Sis. Elizabeth Hollenbeck (North Houston, TX); and Sis. Kerri Maier (East Texas). We thank Bre. A. Howell, R. Hollenbeck, A. Ellison, and M. Wickham for their encouraging words of exhortation. We also thank Bro. Wickham for his talk at the recent baptism.

In June 2007, Sis. DeLayne Beutel moved to Albuquerque, NM. In July 2007, Bro. Ben Beutel moved to Abilene, TX. In October 2007, Bro. David Clubb moved to Simi Hills, CA. We miss their support and fellowship and pray that our heavenly Father will continue to keep them in His loving care as they meet with those of like precious faith in their new locations.

Over the weekend of December 9, 2007, we were blessed with the opportunity to witness the confession of faith and baptism of LORETTA LINDSEY. She had been a student of the Bible for many years, but until a year ago she had not found a group with beliefs and practice consistent with God's Word. It was a joy to see her respond to God's call to the truth and put on Christ's saving name.

We are also pleased to announce that on December 29, 2007, Bro. Aaron Clubb and Sis. Loretta Lindsey were united as one in marriage. We seek God's blessing on their walk together to the kingdom. They will be living in Macon, Georgia, and meeting with the brothers and sisters in the Atlanta area.

John A. Clubb

2008 Southwest Christadelphian Bible School

Lord willing, we plan to conduct the 2008 Southwest Christadelphian Bible School July 6 through July 12. The school will be located at Schreiner University in Kerrville, Texas. The following brethren are scheduled to present the adult and teen classes:

- Bro. Roger Long (Coventry, UK): "Built Together in Him" (adults), "A Holy Nation" (teens).
- Bro. Maurie Beale (Wanganui, NZ): "Six Lessons from Olivet" (adults), "God's Faithful Young People" (teens).
- Bro. Mark Giordano (Norfolk, VA): "Wonders of the Kingdom" (adults), "What Jesus Taught" (teens).

All forms and information are available on the PlanofGod.org website. Inquiries by phone, mail, or email should go to:

Bro. Joe Hill
512-288-0353
11110 South Bay Lane
Austin, TX 78739
joehill@io.com

Minute Meditation

She Did What She Could

There is a very old saying: “God helps those who help themselves.” My father called this type of advice “chimney corner scripture”, because it sounds like it might be in the Bible but is not. While not a Scriptural saying, it does have an element of truth in it. It agrees with a quote of Andrew Carnegie: “You can’t push anyone up the ladder unless he is willing to climb himself.”

One of the most frustrating things that school teachers face is students who have great potential but refuse to apply themselves. Coaches feel the same way when they have a talented athlete who simply will not try. God so loves us that He gave His Son so that we can have the opportunity to live forever. How do you think God feels when most people are not interested?

Many folks recognize that God exists and that He has a plan to reward those who seek him, but they choose not to respond. One of the reasons they give is because they don’t think they can live up to the high standards that God requires, so they would rather not try than risk trying and failing.

It is comforting to realize that God has never made a mistake. The Lord Jesus tells us that “no man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him.” There are many who simply cannot accept that God exists, but for those of us who do, who can see God’s hand working in our lives and in the world around us, and who know God’s standards are the way we should be living our lives, we have been drawn to a higher purpose. God has especially chosen all who have responded to the call of the Gospel. What a great privilege is ours.

To know this high calling and then not try? Incredible. Each of us knows whether we are doing the best we can with what we have right where we are. We have no good excuse for not trying because God does not expect us to do more than we are capable of doing. God knows more about us than we even know about ourselves because Jesus has told us, “Even the very hairs of your head are all numbered.” This proves that God knows every detail about us. He knows if we are trying or not. God does know if we are doing what we could.

Remember what Jesus said of Mary when the disciples criticized her. “Leave her alone,” said Jesus. “Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. She did what she could.”

These words would be good for us to live by. Jesus said, “She did what she could.” Are we doing what we can? Could we be doing more? If not, why not? We cannot use the excuse that we could not, because the real reason is: we will not. The Lord knows what we can do. We need to ask ourselves, Are we willing to do what we can? This very personal question we should not try to answer for someone else. But every so often, just like the school teacher who sees students coasting when

they should be pumping, and the coach who see stars fail for lack of effort, our lack of dedication is often apparent to those around us. We may or may not be fooling others, but this one thing we do know. We are not fooling the Lord. He knows if we are trying or not, and one day soon we will have to give him an accounting of our stewardship. Are we prepared to answer the question: 'Did you do what you could?'

Robert J. Lloyd

The Destruction of Sennacherib

*The Assyrian came down like a wolf on the fold,
And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold;
And the sheen of their spears was like stars on the sea,
When the blue wave rolls nightly on deep Galilee.*

*Like the leaves of the forest when summer is green,
That host with their banners at sunset were seen.
Like the leaves of the forest when autumn hath blown,
That host on the morrow lay withered and strewn.*

*For the Angel of Death went forth on the blast,
And breathed in the face of the foe as he passed;
And the eyes of the sleepers waxed deadly and chill,
And their hearts but once heaved, and forever grew still!*

*And there lay the steed with his nostrils all wide,
But through it there rolled not the breath of his pride;
And the foam of his gasping lay white on the turf,
And cold as the spray on the rock-beating surf.*

*And there lay the rider distorted and pale,
With the dew on his brow, and the rust on his mail;
And the tents were all silent, the banners alone,
The lances unlifted, the trumpet unblown.*

*And the widows of Ashur are loud in their wail,
And the idols are broke in the temple of Baal;
And the might of the Gentile, unsmote by the sword,
Hath melted like snow in the glance of the Lord!*

Lord Byron

Coming Events (Lord Willing)

FEBRUARY

1-3 Camp Ladore, PA Young people's study weekend. Bro Frank Abel: "Nehemiah — Lessons in Leadership". Held near Scranton, PA, for all those 13 and older. Contact Bro Ryan Mutter championvegetable@hotmail.com or go to www.cyccamp.org to register online

3-8 Palm Springs Bible School. Bre. Bill Link, Jr. (Baltimore, MD) and Michael Owen (Seaton, UK). Contact Bro. Jeff Gelineau register@christadelphianbibleschool.org. Or visit website www.californiabibleschool.org

9 Brantford, ON Junior CYC and Little Disciples "Apps Mills" Gathering

16 Brantford, ON Senior CYC Gathering. Bro. Ken Styles (Royal Oak, MI): "Be Ye Holy, For I am Holy"

16,17 Saanich Peninsula, BC Study weekend. Bro. Dev Ramcharan (Toronto West, ON): Subject TBD. Contact Bro. Richard Morgan richie.morgan@gmail.com

MARCH

8,9 Victoria, BC Study weekend. Bro. Mike LeDuke (Kitchener/Waterloo): "With Christ in Mind — Paul's Letter to the Colossians". Contact Sis. Pat Williamson (250-721-4938) pwilliamson@telus.net

15,16 Lompoc Valley, CA Annual study weekend. Bre. Don Pearce (Rugby, UK) and Paul Billington (Brantford, ON): "An Up Close Look at Bible Prophecy Being Fulfilled in Our Time". Registration: contact Bro. Ron Stewart ronandshirley777@aol.com or call 805-733-5577. Seating limited; we suggest an early response

21,22 Simi Valley, CA Bible study and sports challenge. Bro. Allen Laben (Norfolk, VA): "Parables in Luke". Contact Bro. Jason Hensley Jason@speakingofhisglory.com 805-202-6063

21-23 Toronto Fraternal Gathering Silverthorn Collegiate, 291 Mill Road, Toronto, ON. Bro. Tecwyn Morgan (Birmingham, UK): "Jesus Fulfills the Feasts". Contact Bro. Stephen Wilton sdwilton@yahoo.com

21-23 Wichita Falls, TX Spring gathering, Texas Christadelphian Camp and Conference Center, Buffalo, TX. Bro. Roy Styles (Livonia, MI): "Marriage in the Lord". Contact Bro. Larry Beutel, 1900 NW Access Road, Iowa Park, TX 76367; or Bro. John Clubb jclubb4081@aol.com

22,23 Echo Lake, NJ Study weekend. Bro. John Hellawell (Peterborough, UK): "David — Shepherd, Soldier, Sinner, Sovereign, Saint". For CYC: "Creation or Evolution?" Contact Bro. David Link dlink44131@aol.com 973-696-3316

29 Worcester, MA Study day. Bro. Mark Vincent (Boston, MA). Contact Bro. Aaron MacAdams, (978) 502 9690, aaronmacadams@hotmail.com

29 April 5 Florida Bible School Christian Retreat, Bradenton, FL. Adult / teen classes. Bro. Ken Curry (Toronto East, ON): "Bumps along the Road of Discipleship"; Bro. Mike LeDuke (Kitchener-Waterloo, ON): "With Christ in Mind — Paul's Letter to the Colossians"; Bro.

Martin Webster (Kitchener-Waterloo, ON): "The Fifteen-Minute Exhortation". Contact Bro. Walt Dodrill 727-528-1197 waltodrill@msn.com. Registration: Sis. Diane Jennings 727-528-1886 diane@dianej.net

APRIL

5 Boston, MA Study day. Bro. David Levin (Baltimore, MD): "Becoming a Spiritual Person". 9:00 am, lunch served. Contact Bro. Jeff Wallace jeff@tecbs.org 508-763-2981

MAY

2-4 Vancouver Island Sisters' Weekend Nanaimo, BC. "Becoming a Handmaid of the Lord". Sisters Linda Reding and Beth MacAdams (Worcester, MA). For registration information contact Sis. Iris Brown rayandirisbrown@shaw.ca 250-758-4284

2-4 Central Coast Women's Weekend Camp Ocean Pines, Cambria, CA. Sis. Kim Brinkerhoff (Pomona, CA): "God's Beautiful Garden"; Sis. Shirley Barratt (San Luis Obispo, CA): "Walking in God's Garden"; Sis. Helen Jennings (Pomona, CA): "The Garden Restored"; Sis. Ann Crouse (North County San Luis Obispo, CA): "The Secret Garden (John 15)". Exhortation by Bro. John Warner (San Francisco Peninsula, CA): "The Garden Tomb". \$50 non-refundable deposit to secure registration. Contact Sis. Ann Crouse 805-239-3517 RoAnCrouse@aol.com

3,4 Pittsburgh, PA Study weekend. Bro. Ken Styles (Royal Oak, MI): "Godly Love". Contact Bro. David Pommer thepommers@verizon.net 724-224-7363

25,26 Sussex, NB Study weekend. Bro. Dale Crawford (Bedford, NS): "Portrait of the Perfect Man — Job, Jesus and the Saints"

16-18 Hartford City, IN Lake Placid Study Weekend, Lake Placid Conference Center. Bro. Jim Styles (Livonia, MI): "James". Anyone interested in teaching a class for the children please contact Bro. Jerry or Sis. Dorothy Asbury 27 Dogwood Terrace, Maryville, IL 62062 or phone 618-288-5023

JUNE

28 - July 6 Mid-Atlantic Bible School Shippensburg, PA. Bro. Roger Long (Coventry Grosvenor Road, UK): "A Holy Nation"; teens: "We Have Found the Messiah"; Bro. Frank Abel (Shelburne, ON): "The Fate of the Dead"; teens: "Resurrection of the Dead, Who and When?"; Bro. Mark Vincent (Boston, MA): "The Servant and His Songs (Isaiah 40-66)"; teens: "How Readest Thou?". Information at www.christadelphians.net/MACBS

JULY

6-12 Southwest Bible School Schreiner University, Kerrville, TX. Bro. Roger Long (Coventry, UK): "Built Together in Him" (adults), "A Holy Nation" (teens); Bro. Maurie Beale (Wanganui, NZ): "Six Lessons from Olivet" (adults), "God's Faithful Young People" (teens); Bro. Mark Giordano (Norfolk, VA): "Wonders of the Kingdom" (adults), "What Jesus Taught" (teens). Contact Bro. Joe Hill 512-288-0353, 11110 South Bay Lane, Austin, TX 78739, joehill@io.com. Forms at planofgod.org

12-18 Manitoulin Island, ON: THE NEW Manitoulin Family Bible Camp: Theme: "The Kingdom of God — Past and Future". Bro. Jim Cowie (Brisbane, AU): "Cameos of the Kingdom" (adults), and "Events Subsequent to the Return of Christ" (teens); Bro. Chris Sales (Shelburne, ON): "David: A Character Study of His Friends and Foes" (adults and teens). For additional information, please contact Bro. Mike Moore michael.l.moore@rogers.com 519-756-0175

19-27 Eastern Bible School Ascutney Mountain Resort, Brownsville, VT. Bro. Stan Isbell (North Houston, TX): "Pillar and Ground of the Truth: Finding our Role in the Body of Christ" (adults), "Samson: Freefalling to Faith" (teens); Bro. Jim Harper (Meriden, CT): "Pentecost Revisited" (adults); "The Time Will Come When They Will No Longer Endure Sound Doctrine" (teens); Bro. Devon Walker (Manchester, UK): "Jesus in Prayer" (adults), "Biblical Soap Operas" (teens). Contact Bro. Peter Dixon peter@tecbs.org

26-August 2 Manitoulin Bible Camp Theme: "Come out of her and be ye separate". Bro. Bill Link, Jr. (Baltimore, MD): "Jude: Keep Yourself in the Love of God"; Bro. Richard Morgan (Saanich, BC): "Our Spiritual Exodus". Contact Bro. Alex Browning jabrowning@rogers.com 416-284-0290

26-August 3 Midwest Bible School Hanover College, Hanover, IN. Bro. Mark Giordano (Norfolk, VA): "Prophetic Images"; Bro. Frank Abel (Shelburne, ON): "The Fate of the Dead"; Bro. James Mansfield (AU): "How the Lord Treated People". Contact Bro. Mike Livermore, 44943 Yorkshire Drive, Novi, MI 48375 248-462-5740 mike.live@gmail.com

27-August 2 Western Bible School Menucha Conference Center, Corbett, OR. Bro. Ted Sleeper (San Francisco Peninsula, CA): "That I Might Know Him" (adults), "The Gospel of Adam" (teens); Bro. Colin Edwards (Newbury, UK): "Twenty-one Centuries Later: A Comparison Between Their Ecclesial Life and Our Own" (adults), "How Not to Get Lost in a Large Bible" (teens); Bro. Mark Vincent (Boston, MA): "From Paradise to the Promised Land" (adults); TBA (teens). Registration and other information at www.menuchabibleschool.org

AUGUST

9-15 Niagara Falls Bible School St. Catherines, ON. Bro. Nigel Patterson (Cornwall, UK): "Preparing for the Coming King" (adults), "Daring to Be Different" (teens); Bro. John Pople (San Francisco Peninsula, CA): "Powerful Lessons from Mysterious Scenes in the Bible" (adults and teens). For information contact Bro. David Brierley david.brierly@simpatico.ca 416-236-5295