

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1519



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OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

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1519



A monthly magazine published by the Christadelphians (brothers and sisters in Christ) and available throughout the world.

Its objectives are – to encourage the study of the Bible as God's inspired message to mankind; to call attention to the Divine offer of forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ; and to warn men and women that soon Christ will return to Earth as judge and ruler of God's world-wide Kingdom.

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Never the Same Again

As every parent knows, the arrival of a child makes a huge difference to the things a family can do, the way they eat, sleep, rest and play.

For a start everything has to be changed – to make the house safe and to accommodate all the things children seem to need nowadays, quite apart from their toys! But it's all very worthwhile when you think about what has happened. The new arrival gives the family a focus and real hope for the future.

No Children?

In Bible times children were regarded as a blessing from the Lord and if couples were childless it was thought that the Lord had withheld that blessing. Imagine the joy of an older couple when at last they had a long-awaited child! We are told about some of those occasions. Sarah, Abraham's wife, waited many years before Isaac was born and the very name they gave him shows how happy they were – for "Isaac" means "*laughter*". Elizabeth, the aged wife of the priest Zacharias, was also childless and the record says that they were both "*well advanced in years*" (Luke 1:7). Then the priest was told by an angel that they were to have a son, and that they should name him "John" – "*God has been gracious*".

It was every mother's dream in Israel that their son would be the Messiah that God would send into the world. Elizabeth was told that her son John was chosen to proclaim the coming of the Messiah. It was her relative Mary who was chosen to be the mother of

Jesus, when God's Holy Spirit power overshadowed her (Luke 1:35) and for Mary life would never be the same again. At the time she had no husband, though she had a marriage arranged with Joseph. Imagine how difficult that would have been in a small town like Nazareth, when Mary was found to be pregnant before their marriage. As later events reveal, when Jesus was old enough to be asked to read in the Nazareth synagogue, everybody thought he was just Mary's son.

Thirty Years

If Mary had to bear the burden of village gossip and spiteful innuendo for all her years at Nazareth, it would have been the same for Jesus. Years later, when he had left Nazareth and was undertaking his Father's work, preaching and teaching the gospel of salvation, there were still people who tried to embarrass him by making snide references about the circumstances of his birth: They said to him, "*We were not born of fornication; we have one Father—God*" (John 8:41).

The implication was clear. But if they had only thought about it, they would have realised that his birth supported the claim that Jesus made to be the Son of God. Have you ever thought that this unpleasantness was completely avoidable? If Jesus had been born in Herod's palace, instead of in Bethlehem, nobody would have questioned the circumstances – they wouldn't have dared. And if he had been reared in a palace his life would have been much more comfortable and far more protected. Instead he spent thirty years in a small out-of-the-

way town working as a carpenter or jobbing builder. He would have been at everyone's beck and call, working with his hands, struggling to make a living for his parents and their large family. When Joseph died, for he was not around in the later phase of Jesus' life and work, then the responsibility for the family would have fallen on him, as the eldest child in the family. And all of this happened as Jesus was waiting for the right time to begin his public ministry, in which he would invite men and women to follow him in the service of his heavenly Father.

God Always Knows

Of course it was no accident that resulted in the choice of Mary to be the mother of the Messiah. God knew exactly what was necessary to shape and mould His Son. He wanted him to identify completely with ordinary people: the very ones who would later be willing to follow him and lay down their lives in faithful service, if needs be. Jesus was not cushioned from the hardships of life: he knew them from inside the struggling working-class family of which he was a key member.

Not for him king's palaces, or a sheltered upbringing. He has been where we have all been and has shown that it is possible to do a decent day's hard work and to make it part of a dedicated life of service and satisfaction. Much later one of his followers would write these words of advice to people who were slaves, and who might have been tempted to do the bare necessity, as a way of protesting about the curtailment of their liberty:

Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God. And

whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ (Colossians 3:22–24).

Jesus could so easily have protested at being lumbered with the responsibilities of family life, when he had come to do a much greater service for humanity. But he did not. The apostle Paul summed up his position in just a few words when he wrote that Jesus "*humbled himself and became obedient*" (Philippians 2:8). It is a fine example for each of us to follow.

Never the Same

Since the birth, the life, the death and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ everything has changed. Things will never be the same again, for he has given us the perfect example of how to live and has shown us what humanity can achieve, with God's help. It wasn't that his birth just changed one family in Nazareth. It has changed family life itself.

For the work of Jesus was designed by God to make it possible for people like us to become adopted members of the family of God. We were not born in the same way that Jesus was born. But we can be reborn, by believer's baptism, to become God's children, because of what Jesus has done for us:

The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs — heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with him, that we may also be glorified together (Romans 8:16–17).

Editor

The Road of Life

*Things don't always go smoothly as we travel through life. There are plenty of potholes and dangers along the way. Illness, personal tragedy and unexpected loss can easily catch us out and those things can affect our faith in God and in His loving care. In the last article **David Nightingale** explained that God has a purpose which will eventually put all these problems right, when Jesus returns from heaven to rule on earth. Now he explains why things went wrong and what we should be doing to get ready for the return of Jesus.*

In the Beginning

Things went wrong right at the start of Bible times, when Adam and Eve messed up in the Garden of Eden. Mankind was given a choice by God which amounted to something like this: 'Live life My way', said God, 'and enjoy life, or go your own way, but I have to warn you that it will lead only to suffering and death'.

Our first parents thought they knew better. They succumbed to the idea that they could be like gods, looking for a short-cut to the best things in life. Instead they found only sweat, toil and travail. But from the beginning God also took action to begin to turn the position around.

He arranged that the world would show them that things were not right, instead of everything continuing to be like a paradise, as it had been in Eden. Providing food was to become a real chore, for the blighted earth itself would make life difficult with pests and

weeds competing with mankind for sufficient to eat. So when things go wrong in life and the earth appears to be unstable or explosive, remember that this is part of God's warning system to show us that the world is not yet under His full control.

Because Adam and Eve had broken God's law, they were excluded from the Garden where they had been under angelic care and protection. Now they were living in sin and they needed that problem resolved before they could return to the state of fellowship and harmony that had existed at first.

Try as they might, human inventiveness and ingenuity would be insufficient to sort out that problem. It would require a divine solution, for God alone can put such things right. The recovery process began at once when the pair were given clothing (by God) – an animal or animals were slain and their skins were used for clothing – to cover their shame and their nakedness. The clothing would only be a temporary covering; it could not be a complete solution. But at the very beginning they would have understood that a death was needed to cover their sin.

A Way Back?

The way of life the pair had chosen would be a hard one. What they had thought might bring instant godliness



turned out to be a very bad choice. Instead of becoming like God, they had shown that human rebellion and wilfulness would only lead to death, suffering, sadness and pain. But it did not have to be like that. There was an alternative. If they tried to live a life close to God then there was a way to the best kind of life of all – the Hope of salvation and the Hope of a better world – a world as God intended when He first created it.

- It would be a difficult way with many personal challenges so that we would all learn the value of what He had promised.
- It would take a long time, so that as many people as possible had the opportunity of sharing in all that God promised.
- There was the promise of a Saviour, who would deal sin a death-blow but who would be wounded himself in the process.

For in the very first promise ever made, God anticipated the time when Jesus would come to rescue His creation from the bondage of sin and death. This is what Adam and Eve were told about that deliverance: that one day a woman would give birth to a Deliverer who would destroy the power of sin:

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel (Genesis 3:15 ESV).

Rough Road Ahead

So why are there disappointments, frustrations, pains and sadness in life? They are designed to teach us that there is something seriously wrong with our personal lives: something that

needs putting right. God has said that all these things can be put right, but it has to be done in His way, and in His good time. In the meantime we have to learn patience and endurance. We have to believe that God has a plan and that it is still on track. Like Adam and Eve we may be tempted to think there should be a quick fix, or even that mankind is clever enough to sort out all his present problems. But there is little to indicate that, as the world staggers from one crisis to another. Take natural disasters like earthquakes, volcanoes, hurricanes or floods. They are part of what the apostle Paul once called the groaning of the created world, when he said:

*I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. **For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.** And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies (Romans 8:18–23).*

Think about it and you will see that we often make these birthpangs more painful than they need to be. People live in an earthquake-prone area but they ignore the government's building-control laws which are designed to make buildings resistant to sudden shocks. Others live near to volcanoes

because the land there is fertile, and they hope for the best and won't evacuate even when asked. Houses are built on flood plains regardless of what is known about previous inundations. Vast forests are felled despite warnings about climate consequences. And so on.



Commercial and other pressures often dominate and when disaster strikes, people blame God and wonder what, if anything, He is doing about it.

Action Plan

God has a plan which is being worked out, and is now coming to its final phase. If we want to be part of it, we have to:

- 1 Acknowledge that both in our individual lives and in the wider world there is something fundamentally wrong with our world and with ourselves.
- 2 Ask Him to help us sort out the difficulties, whatever they are.
- 3 Seek out, through His Word – the Bible – a way of life which will lead us to a closer relationship with God and ultimately to the great reward He has promised when Jesus comes again.

In short, the first thing we need to do is to pray – however imperfectly we feel we do it. Praying is not a matter of flowery words from a prayer book and we do not need a human priest to help us do that. The important thing is that you mean what you say and say what you mean. Nor does prayer require a special place or time. Do it now – whilst what you wish to pray about is in your heart and mind. Make no precon-

ditions and construct no barriers. Then go on your way looking for the answer. Often that answer is to be found in the Word of God itself, so make it a regular practice to read the Bible. Try to do that every day.

Give God the opportunity to be heard – by you. You have my personal assurance that it has worked in my life. I have found that if things don't seem to be working out it's usually because I have forgotten to seek God's guidance or because of my impatience – certainly not because He has failed.

The Road Ahead

One, dusky dusty African evening, I was speeding along a dirt road when in the headlights I caught sight of a huge ditch stretching out across the road. Of course I tried to brake, but on the dusty track the car went into a prolonged skid. It seemed certain that the car, with us in it, would nose-dive into the hole.

At the last second the car slewed round and came to rest with its near-side wheels on the very brim of the ditch. We cautiously got out of the car to assess the situation, passengers through the offside doors! All I could say was, "God must have held us in His hand. Thanks be to Him and Him alone!"

There are many such dangers for all of us as we travel along the road of life. So make sure you travel along it with God, and with the Lord Jesus Christ. Don't choose to travel alone.

David Nightingale

“There were giants ...”

In October this year photographs were circulated around the Christian world showing the alleged discovery of a giant skeleton in Greece. One of those photographs appears on this page, so you can make up your own mind whether the skeleton was that of a giant or not.

True or False?

The skeleton certainly looks large compared to the man photographed behind it. However, since the media at large have not reported the find, it was considered by many to be a hoax and it may have been. It is not difficult nowadays for clever photographers to produce distorted pictures, often by just cleverly positioning objects in relation to one another.

Nevertheless, large skulls have, reportedly, been found in places like India and Malta, and there have always been unusually tall human

beings in the world. We know from Scripture that the Anakims were an exceptionally tall race of people, one of which was the notorious Goliath of Gath, who David slew.

We are not surprised therefore if, from time to time, large skeletons are unearthed, in different regions of the world, and it would be sensational if some of these were to be found in Israel, near where Goliath lived.

The Nephilim

Some religious groups have cited the finding of giant skeletons as archaeological proof of the giants spoken of in Genesis:

There were giants on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men and they bore children to them. Those were the mighty men who were of old, men of renown (Genesis 6:4).



The Hebrew word translated giants in this passage is from the textually rare word Nephilim, which some translators believe to have come from the root nephal meaning to fall. Thus, Young's Literal Translation has:

The fallen ones were in the earth in those days, and even afterwards when sons of God come in unto daughters of men, and they have borne to them – they are the heroes, who, from of old, are the men of name.

This seems to fit the context better than giants. For people born into the chosen line of Seth were called sons of God (see Genesis 6:2), just as all true believers are now called His children:

Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. (1 John 3:1).

Inter-Marriage

Now some of those descendants of Seth had fallen from grace, and had taken wives amongst the ungodly line of Cain (the sons and daughters of men). Who these renowned offspring actually were, resulting from these illicit marriages, is lost to our knowledge but it was their activities that led to the corruption and violence that eventually brought the flood upon the earth. For shortly after recording the unwise inter-marriages, we read this:

God said to Noah, “The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth. Make yourself an ark of gopherwood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and outside with pitch” (Genesis 6:13–14).

History Repeating Itself

Jesus taught that just before his return to earth conditions here would be like the days of Noah and the days of Lot:

As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man: they ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. Likewise as it was also in the days of Lot: they ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; but on the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed (Luke 17:26–30).

Today many people complain about the increasing violence and moral corruption in our world. Mankind has largely rejected God, and without the spiritual guidance of His Word the Bible, are free to do more or less as they wish. Yet as you can see from the prophetic words of Jesus, this moral decline is one of the many signs that the coming of Christ is not very far away. Wise people will note these developments and seek the Lord whilst He may be found. It was the prophet Isaiah, speaking more than 2500 years ago, who gave this good advice:

Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon (Isaiah 55:6–7).

Malcolm Edwards

Peace in the Middle East?

*In this review of current affairs **Andrew White** has demonstrated that the sad and bad things now happening signify that the world is in the final phase of man's rule and that we are nearing the opening phase of a new society, when God's Kingdom is re-established on earth. Jesus is to return to Jerusalem from which city he is to rule as King. So what are the prospects for peace breaking out in that troubled part of the world?*

Headline Grabbers

The relationship between Israel and its immediate neighbours, the Palestinians, continue to feature in the world's headlines. With the extremist organisation Hamas in charge of Gaza and the more moderate Mahmoud Abbas presiding over the Palestinian West Bank, negotiations are never going to be easy, for the Palestinian President only has influence over some of the Palestinian people. Having tried to seal off the West Bank with a wall, the Israeli government has also tried to isolate Gaza, especially to stop weapons reaching the militants. As well as tightly controlling the crossings into Israel they have been maintaining a naval blockade.

You will have heard of the Israeli raids on the relief ships bringing supplies to the Palestinian people in Gaza and the ensuing hatred of Israel for her actions in what is being described as a botched operation to prevent Israel's illegal blockade being broken. Israel is fast becoming a pariah state as she is deeply hated by Arab nations and their allies. Yet her actions are merely designed to protect her people from the constant terrorist threats and rocket attacks by the Hamas controlled factions that will never want a lasting peace treaty. The preface to the

Hamas Charter and Covenant, declared in 1988, includes this quotation from Imam Hassan al-Banna:

“Israel will exist and continue to exist until Islam will obliterate it, just as it obliterated others before it.”

Negotiations Continue

Against this background of blockade, isolation, hatred and counter-claims about rights and ownership, Washington has been trying to get negotiations going again. Secretary of State Hilary Clinton has been at work and US President Obama has met Benjamin Netanyahu and Mahmoud Abbas. Negotiations of one sort or another have been taking place for many years, and through many US presidencies, but peace remains elusive. The offer by Israel to recognise the existence of a Palestinian State has not been met with Palestinian willingness to recog-



nise Israel's right to exist and at present the talks are stalled over the question of Israel's continued building on land the Palestinians claim as theirs.

There seems to be little chance of a binding peace agreement, even if President Abbas was to sign such an undertaking. For he lacks the authority to impose it and it would probably provoke the Hamas faction to even greater violence against Israel. The position seems hopeless, but has the Bible anything to say about this state of affairs so near to the Return of Jesus?

Old Testament Prophecy

The Middle East dilemma is the long-prophesied key to the state of the world when Jesus comes back to the earth to set up his Kingdom. Prophecies show Israel in the last days will be isolated from her former allies, so what is happening now should come as no surprise to Bible readers. 2400 years ago the prophet Zechariah said this about Jerusalem – a city that both Israelis and Palestinians want as their capital city:

It shall happen in that day that I will make Jerusalem a very heavy stone for all peoples; all who would heave it away will surely be cut in pieces, though all nations of the earth are gathered against it (Zechariah 12:3).

God has promised that He will never allow His people to suffer annihilation, because the existence of the nation of Israel is His guarantee that His purpose is in its final phase:

'For I am with you,' says the Lord, 'to save you; Though I make a full end of all nations where I have scattered you, yet I will not make a complete end of you. But I will correct you in justice,

and will not let you go altogether unpunished' (Jeremiah 30:11).

'I have declared and saved, I have proclaimed, and there was no foreign god among you; therefore you are My witnesses,' says the Lord, 'that I am God' (Isaiah 43:12).

Jews in Jerusalem



We can rest assured knowing that God keeps His promises. For after centuries of dispersion, during which the Jews were scattered to all nations, the nation has now been re-established. Once again there are Jews in Jerusalem. It was also predicted that when they eventually returned to that city, where once their kings sat upon David's throne, that they would be surrounded by enemies and that the hostility that characterised their ancient relations with surrounding people would still be there. One prophet calls it the 'ancient hatred' (Ezekiel 35:5) and another predicts that Israel's troubles are not yet ended, but that there is yet another conflict to be fought (and lost) before Messiah comes:

Behold, the day of the Lord is coming, and your spoil will be divided in your midst. For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem; the city shall be taken, the houses rifled, and the women ravished. Half of the city

shall go into captivity, but the remnant of the people shall not be cut off from the city (Zechariah 14:1,2).

This coming defeat is part of what the prophets call 'the time of Jacob's trouble' (Jeremiah 30:7), though that prophet then adds 'but he shall be saved out of it'. And Zechariah explains how that salvation will come. For when everything looks desperate for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the prophet promises:

Then the Lord will go forth and fight against those nations, as he fights in the day of battle. And in that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives (Zechariah 14:3–4).

For the regathered nation will then acknowledge Jesus as their long-awaited Deliverer, the one whom their fathers pierced (Zechariah 12:10) and the long-awaited Kingdom will then be established, centred in Jerusalem which will become the capital city of the world. As Zechariah goes on to say when describing the great changes that are to come to pass:

And the Lord shall be King over all the earth. In that day it shall be 'The Lord is one,' and his name one (Zechariah 14:9).

Last Stages

There are many other signs that show we are in the last stages of a world which is now in crisis. During 2009, the UK Government's Chief Scientist, Professor John Beddington put these predictions to a London Conference:

- The growing world population will cause a 'perfect storm' of food, energy and water shortages.
- By 2030 the demand for resources will create a crisis with dire consequences.

➤ Demand for food and energy will jump 50% by 2030 and fresh water by 30%, as the population tops 8.3 Billion, and

➤ Climate change will exacerbate matters in unpredictable ways.

These predictions were made only a few months before the full realisation dawned on the world of the terrible economic mess that most countries are now in, which is likely to take many years to resolve.

Our Opportunity

Just think about this. God has revealed to us the state the world will be in when He sends Jesus back to rescue mankind from the failed human government we now see in operation. In His Word, God explains what He wants us to do to prepare for the Coming of Jesus. At present we are like the disciples who were sailing across a storm-tossed sea and who feared for their lives. There seemed to be no hope of deliverance until Jesus came to calm the storm and get them safely to shore.

Faith in the promises of God and in the saving work of the Lord Jesus is our lifeline. When we acknowledge that God is in charge and that everything that happens is part of His gracious purpose we can have hope of surviving the present and of living with Jesus in a much better society which he will establish when he returns. But we have to take advantage of the opportunity we have now so that we can be a part of a world which will be free of crisis and full of peace and joy, when everything resounds to the glory of God.

Andrew White

Part Four

A Christian Conscience

In this series **Dennis Gillett** has shown that a Christian conscience has to be informed and directed by the teaching of the Bible and has taken as an example the matter of conscientious objection to warfare and armed engagement in pursuit of human objectives. In this concluding article he explains why he believes it is wrong for a Christian to engage in military activities.

What did Jesus Say?

If there is one saying of the King which sums up precisely what has been said and our attitude to war, it is in the gospel of John, when Jesus was asked by Pilate if he really was a king. This is what Jesus said in reply:

“My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now my kingdom is not from here” (John 18:36).

Here is something that we have been trying to emphasize earlier in this series of articles. The matter is settled on the question of the sort of kingdom over which Jesus now rules. Jesus said that if he was a worldly king then his servants would fight. If his disciples based their lives on the principles of human government and human wisdom then indeed they would fight but they do not, for they are different. Jesus spoke similar words to the apostle John, when giving him a revelation of things that were shortly to come to pass:

He who leads into captivity shall go into captivity; he who kills with the



sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints (Revelation 13:10).

The expression ‘the patience and the faith of the saints’ means that it is a guiding rule for the followers of Jesus that they do not respond to violence with violence, for they do not wage war in the flesh but against sin.

The Apostolic Faith

Following the example and teaching of Jesus, his apostles encouraged their hearers and readers to act accordingly, as follows:

For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:4–5).

A servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, (2 Timothy 2:24–25).

Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honour giving preference to one another; not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord (Romans 12:9–11).

If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head (Romans 12:20),

this sentiment being firmly based on the Lord's teaching:

'Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you' (Matthew 5:44).

Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing (1 Peter 3:8,9).

All these passages call for gentleness, peace and compassion and seem to insist on conciliation and



goodness, even towards those who are regarded as enemies. Followers of Jesus have to ask themselves, how they could be obedient to these exhortations and, at the same time, go to war to fight and destroy?

Love one Another

Now consider this argument. Would it not be a denial of all that New Testament believers stood for in the matter of their nature and fellowship if disciples joined by a common faith and having a common hope, and governed by the same law of love, should begin to slay one another because some human government said they must? Fellow believers in Germany, France, America, Scandinavia, or wherever, are first and foremost our brethren – brothers and sisters in Christ. To fight and slay them would be an utter contradiction of our faith, a denial of our calling.

This one point alone shows that the disciples of Christ are detached from the quarrels of nations: otherwise this impossible proposal that they should kill one another would have to be accepted. So our position as Christadelphians is this:

- ❖ War is an essential part of the society that is dominated by sin and therefore as man cannot free himself from sin he cannot bring universal peace by abolishing war.
- ❖ Human society is not governed by divine, but human law and war is inevitable because of the way human nature works things out. People fight when they cannot resolve their differences peacefully.
- ❖ War serves the same sort of function in society that pain does in a diseased body. It shows that things are not right and that remedial

treatment is needed. God has a solution from that pain for war will be abolished as a result of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, even though force will be used first of all to remove those aspects of society which are irremediably corrupt.

The Pilgrim Path

Our refusal to participate in war comes from the fact that as baptized believers we have become citizens of another kingdom, the kingdom of God and have given allegiance to another king – the Lord Jesus Christ. It is our understanding from the Bible that at least for the time being he has forbidden his servants to fight in the wars of nations. This separation from the politics and governments of men affects us in other ways too.

- ❖ We do not vote nor seek to become elected.
- ❖ We do not seek the processes of human tribunals or courts to coerce others or to seek redress for ourselves
- ❖ We recognise ourselves to be pilgrims in this world, and are thankful that we are allowed to live to worship God according to our conscience. We remain grateful for such benefits as this society may care to bestow upon us, but we recognise that we are not in a position to demand our rights since we are but pilgrims here.

Being a conscientious objector is a very serious matter. We are asking that we be allowed to escape what others have to endure. These people are ready to give their all in defence of what they conscientiously believe to be right. Most of them do bravely what

has to be done and are willing to face with courage some of the most awful things that have been devised for the destruction and suffering of other people.

Serious Consequences

Our position as conscientious objectors might appear to be an easy option but that is not the case. Our position imposes on us a very solemn responsibility, namely that if we are so anxious to follow our conscience in this matter we shall be just as anxious and careful to follow it in other matters. Conscience is indivisible. It must work in all aspects of a believer's life.

It is a shame for any disciple to be carefully unworldly when it comes to war but quite definitely worldly when it comes to getting on and seeking the most the world can provide. Taking advantage of everything that the world offers and living as if this were the only life, would be a travesty of the position that should be adopted. Our unworldliness in war demands that we shall seek to be unworldly everywhere else — otherwise we shall find ourselves to have violated the law of Christian conscience to our shame.



Ever-Present Watchman

Christian conscience is a watchman which looks after you everywhere you go and whatever you do.

- ❖ You watch a film on television and then you cannot sleep because you know it was impure — that is your conscience at work.
- ❖ You choose a video and it excites you while you watch it but afterwards you are filled with remorse — that is conscience.
- ❖ You looked through a magazine and hoped nobody would catch you, but you are worried they might — that is conscience.
- ❖ You joined with others and laughed at the doubtful joke, but afterwards you felt ashamed — that is conscience.
- ❖ You spent money on something which a saint ought not to buy and then you wished you had not — that is conscience.
- ❖ In the argument you lost your temper and said something bitter and cutting and hurtful, and when you got home you wished desper-

ately you had kept quiet — that is conscience.

- ❖ You were in a tight spot and you got out of it successfully, but you had to tell a lie to do it and then you felt degraded — that is conscience.
- ❖ Somebody you know was in real need and you knew it but could not bring yourself to actually part with the money, and the next day you felt ashamed — that is conscience.
- ❖ While your friends are at the meeting worshipping God you are in a place where no disciple ought to be and something keeps chiding you — that is conscience.
- ❖ As you left the house you slammed the door on someone who loves you and now you are worried — that is conscience.

Then one day you came and poured out all your weakness, confessed your failure, acknowledged your sin and made bare your soul — and found pardon and grace and cleansing. And it was conscience that provoked it. Let us thank God for the gift of conscience.

Dennis Gillett

Prayer for Faith

I pray for faith to rise above all pain and sorrow;
I pray for faith to rise above all doubt and fear;
I pray I won't be anxious for tomorrow
But strong in faith – remembering God is near.

I pray for faith to rise above all disappointment,
For faith to trust God fully, as I should;
Then I will be assured with deep conviction
That all things work together for my good.

Colleen Simons



Who or what is a Saint?

*At a time when Pope Benedict has been visiting Britain to beatify a Cardinal and has proclaimed a 19th century nun in Australia to be a saint, this article by **Hamilton Wilson** explains from the Bible that sainthood is something very different. Far from it being the case that supposed miracles show that the “saint” in question is alive and active in heaven, saints are alive and active in quite different ways.*

Misconceptions

Every day many people pray to God using as their go-between or intercessor someone who died many years ago and is now unconscious in the grave, experiencing the “sleep” of death. But the Bible is insistent that only one person has ever ascended to heaven, and that is the Lord Jesus Christ who now sits at the right hand of God in glory:

No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven (John 3:13).

Furthermore we are expressly told that there is only one person who can act as an intercessor or mediator, through whom we can pray to God:

For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 2:5).

It follows that the widespread belief that a company of saints exists in heaven who are working with Jesus is not based on Bible teaching but upon wishful thinking and false human teaching. This is not said to attack the views and beliefs of others, many of which are undoubtedly sincerely held, but to point out the clear teaching of Scripture and to direct readers to the only acceptable way of presenting prayers and petitions to God – through

the Lord Jesus Christ. For Jesus once said to his baptized followers:

*Whatever you ask **in my name**, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son (John 14:13).*

Tradition or Truth?

If you are still reading this article, and I hope you are, then the implications of the above will not be lost on you. If only Jesus has gone to heaven then nobody else has. People who died in the past – including people whose lives featured in the Bible – have ceased to exist for the time being: their hope being centred in the resurrection of the dead.

- The apostle Peter explained as much to the citizens of Jerusalem when he said that King David was dead and buried and that he never ascended to heaven (Acts 2:29-35).
- The apostle Paul wrote at length to the Corinthian believers to explain the vital importance of resurrection, without which they had no hope of life after death (1 Corinthians chapter 15).
- The unnamed writer to the Hebrews included a catalogue of faithful men and women from times past who had received great promises

from God which they have never yet received because, as he explained, they will get their reward when all the faithful are rewarded together at the coming of Jesus to earth (Hebrews 11:13,39-40).

So, however detailed the process might be of making someone a saint, according to human tradition – progressing through beatification and setting up a panel to determine whether or not a miracle has actually taken place – this is not something based on Bible teaching and it contradicts what the Bible actually teaches. Yet the Bible talks often about saints with about a hundred references to them. So, who or what is a Bible saint?

Let the Bible Explain

First of all consider these passages about the state of the dead:

All things come alike to all: one event happens to the righteous and the wicked; to the good, the clean, and the unclean; to him who sacrifices and him who does not sacrifice. As is the good, so is the sinner; he who takes an oath as he who fears an oath. This is an evil in all that is done under the sun: that one thing happens to all. Truly the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil; madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead. But for him who is joined to all the living there is hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion. For the living know that they will die; but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, their hatred, and their envy have now perished; nevermore will they have a share in anything done under the sun. (Ecclesiastes 9:2–6).

Those who trust in their wealth and boast in the multitude of their riches, none of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him – for the redemption of their souls is costly, and it shall cease forever – that he should continue to live eternally, and not see the Pit. For he sees wise men die; likewise the fool and the senseless person perish, and leave their wealth to others ... Nevertheless man, though in honour, does not remain; he is like the beasts that perish. (Psalm 49:6-10,12).



There are other passages that could be quoted, but it is sufficient to learn from the above that it doesn't matter whether you are rich or poor, good or bad, all perish in the grave and have no conscious existence after death, and no part any longer in this world's affairs. The Christian's confident hope is in resurrection when Christ returns.

So who is a Saint?

Let's look at the origin of the word "saint" in the Bible, and how it is used in Scripture, and who are described as being saints – and how you can become a saint! Two words are most commonly used in the original Hebrew (of the Old Testament) and are trans-

lated “saint” – *chaciyd*, which means a religious or pious or godly person; and *qodesh* which means someone who is consecrated or sanctified, which simply means “set apart”. So both words mean more or less the same thing. Here’s an example of the use of *qodesh*:

This is the blessing with which Moses the man of God blessed the children of Israel before his death. And he said: ‘The Lord came from Sinai, and dawned on them from Seir; He shone forth from Mount Paran, and He came with ten thousands of saints; from His right hand came a fiery law for them’. Yes, He loves the people; all His saints are in Your hand; they sit down at Your feet; everyone receives Your words (Deuteronomy 33:1–3).

It’s quite clear that Moses is here addressing the children of Israel, and the reference is to God leading the Israelites out of Egypt towards the Promised Land. God had chosen the Israelites to be his own holy people, and they were called out from the nations to be sanctified, or separate, to Him. (The fact that they failed doesn’t alter the fact that God chose them to be holy to Him, or to be His “saints”).

In verse 4 Moses refers to them as “*the congregation of Jacob*”, Jacob being grandson of Abraham, and forefather of the twelve tribes of Israel.

More Examples

The Psalms are full of references to the saints, and help to give us a definition of who they were, and how they qualified to be saints.

Oh, love the Lord, all you his saints! For the Lord preserves the faithful, and fully repays the proud person (Psalm 31:23).

Hebrew poetry isn’t like our poetry, which used to rhyme, though not so now! The form used was known as “Hebrew parallelism”, whereby the same thought was repeated in different words. So in this example, the saints are “the faithful”.

“Gather My saints together to Me, those who have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice” (Psalm 50:5).

So here’s a useful definition. Saints are those who have made a covenant with God by sacrifice – in the case of the Old Testament faithful, that would have been one of the sacrifices required under the Law of Moses. In the case of New Testament believers, it is through the sacrifice of Christ that we make a covenant with God.

You who love the Lord, hate evil! He preserves the souls of His saints; He delivers them out of the hand of the wicked (Psalm 97:10).

Summary

This is what we have learned so far, with more to come in the next article, God willing. Saints are those people who:

- ✓ love the Lord;
- ✓ have chosen good rather than evil,
- ✓ are loyal and faithful to him,
- ✓ have made a covenant with God by the sacrifice of His Son,
- ✓ have dedicated their lives to His service,
- ✓ have regarded themselves, and been regarded by God, as separate and holy to Him.

Hamilton Wilson

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