

Glad Tidings

Of The Kingdom Of God



Featured **Articles**

Vengeance Is Mine (p. 3)

The Purpose Of Life (p. 6)

Born Free (p. 13)

A monthly magazine written and 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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Vengeance Is Mine

IT WAS DUSK, so I stopped at the side of the road to fit my bike lights. Suddenly another cyclist came hurtling around a blind corner, swerved to avoid colliding with me, spat something abusive about my stopping in a stupid place, and pedalled off along a footpath under a sign that said ‘No cycling’.

My impulse of course was to give chase, catch up with him and explain, forcefully and by means possibly involving pushing him off his bike, that actually it was he and not I who was in the wrong. That however would have been the wrong thing to do on many levels, and it’s certain that no good would have come of it.

Retaliation

One of the most basic human urges is to retaliate when someone wrongs you. It feels natural and right to get your own back. One of the most difficult things Jesus Christ demands of his followers is to resist this urge.

You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your

tunic, let him have your cloak also (Matthew 5:38–40).

“An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” was a principle which came from the Law of Moses (Leviticus 24:19–22). It was part of God’s instructions to the rulers who were responsible for administering justice in Israel. If someone caused harm to someone else, they were to suffer what they inflicted on their victim, but no more than the damage they had caused. Jesus said, if you’re the victim don’t demand retribution—instead, be prepared to forgive.

The apostle Paul put it like this:

Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord. Therefore “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 12:17–20).

It’ll come as no surprise to learn that Paul was quoting from the Old Testament. “Vengeance is Mine” is a refrain which occurs a number of times (for example Deuteronomy 32:35). God makes clear



that vengeance is His prerogative, and this is a hugely important principle. God knows what is going on in people's heads, what might be making them do the things they do. And He knows how to deal with them. If someone hurt us and we were to give them what we think they deserve, we would be likely to get it wrong.

And the instruction to be good to your enemy is a quote from Proverbs 25:21–22. What does it mean, if you repay good for evil “you will heap coals of fire on his head”? Experience shows that being nice to someone who's nasty to you will often have one of two outcomes: either it will irritate them because they are deprived of the satisfaction they were aiming for, or (surprisingly often) it will win them over. Either way, their pride or their conscience is scorched, and this gives the best chance of the best outcome—that is, to turn them from their folly and show them a better way.

The Example of Jesus

This principle of non-retaliation was one which Jesus himself lived by. He was not weak. When there was error to be tackled, he tackled it head on (Matthew 15:3); when there was injustice to call out, he did it loud and clear (Matthew 23:14); when people were disrespecting God he stopped it (Matthew 21:12); but when he was victimised, he did not stand up for himself. The Gospel records describe how he endured without complaint the awful abuse from his enemies which culminated in his execution (Mark 15:5).

As the soldiers hoisted him on to the cross on which he was to suffer the most excruciating death ever devised by humankind, his words were “*Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do*” (Luke 23:34).

By doing this he set an example for his followers. And he did more than this—he was carrying out God's will by giving his life as a sacrifice to save us from our sins.



When we contemplate this act of love which is at the centre of the Gospel, we may well assess our own behaviour in an entirely new light.

For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow his steps: “who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in his mouth”; who, when he was reviled, did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but committed himself to Him who judges righteously; who himself bore our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed (1 Peter 2:21–24).

Habakkuk

HABAKKUK WAS a prophet of God at the time the Babylonians were attacking Judah, around 610 BC. The prophet was perplexed: why did God appear to let wicked nations like Babylon prosper—and even be allowed to punish God’s people (1:3)? God’s answer was to show him that despite present appearances He has a plan which will one day triumph and bring blessings for the righteous: *“I will work a work in your days which you would not believe, though it were told you...”* (Habakkuk 1:5).

Vision Of The Kingdom

From the watchtower on the walls of Jerusalem (2:1), the prophet was enabled to see forward across the centuries, to the time when the wicked will cease. Then *“the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea”* (2:14).



Chapter 3 contains a *“prayer of Habakkuk”* (v. 1), which is in the form of a song. The prophet was inspired to recall God’s past triumphs, when Israel were saved from Egypt and when they entered the Promised Land (see Deuteronomy 33:2). Looking ahead, he saw that there will be a repeat of that victory when Christ comes, with his immortal followers, bringing fearful judgement on the wicked nations (3:16).

The Victory Of Faith

Despite present troubles, those who have faith in God will be blessed when Christ returns. Those who are made “just” (or righteous) in Christ will “live” in that day (2:4, 14). So they can rejoice, even in trouble, knowing of the things in store when *“it will surely come; it will not tarry”* (2:3; see Hebrews 10:37–38).

Norman Owen

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Some interesting links with other parts of the Bible

- ◆ Habakkuk 1:4—see Job 20:5; Psalm 94:3; Jeremiah 12:1.
- ◆ Habakkuk 2:3–4—see Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:37–38.
- ◆ Habakkuk 3:3—see Deuteronomy 33:2; Judges 5:4; Psalm 68:7.

The Purpose Of Life

SOONER OR LATER each of us must ask ourselves—does life have a purpose?

Some conclude that life is just an accident; that history is a tale told by an idiot; the only golden rule is “do to others before they do to you!” Morality is then simply a question of “*Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!*” (as the Bible succinctly puts it in Isaiah 22:13). There are many people who profess this view as the purpose of life, but it strikes me as a shallow and unreflective answer. It’s actually preached more often than consistently followed, because its adherents are usually quick to talk about ‘justice!’ and ‘fair play!’ and ‘my rights!’ when they feel themselves to be hard done by—as though the moral standards which do not apply to them should nevertheless apply to others.

Humanism

A more thoughtful answer to our question is the ‘humanist’ approach. According to this mode of thought, life may or may not have originated by accident, but whether it did or not, the only purpose shaping our life is the human purpose. We determine our own values and ideals, and we fix our own goals. There is therefore no absolute standard of morality.

Many humanists dedicate their lives to helping and benefiting others. Some do

an enormous amount of practical good; others contribute to knowledge in which others can share for the good of humanity.

Humanism is widely prevalent and has replaced Christianity in many countries of the world. But I believe it is a fundamentally mistaken view, and in the final analysis it is unsatisfactory and unfulfilling. To illustrate this I want to share with you the writings of a man who, we might say, examined the humanist approach to life.

For what happens to the sons of men also happens to animals; one thing befalls them: as one dies, so dies the other. Surely, they all have one breath; man has no advantage over animals, for all is vanity. All go to one place: all are from the dust, and all return to dust. Who knows the spirit of the sons of men, which goes upward, and the spirit of the animal, which goes down to the earth? (Ecclesiastes 3:19–21).



I would recommend you read the first three chapters of the Bible book of Ecclesiastes at your leisure to find out more.

The writer was probably King Solomon, son of King David, who reigned in the 10th Century BC. Here is a thoughtful man. A man who put wisdom first; who tried everything this world has to offer; whose life was crowned by



one achievement upon another. His record in history is impressive by any measure. And yet, what does he feel about this? What satisfaction does it bring him? His conclusion: *“Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done and on the labour in which I had toiled; and indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind. There was no profit under the sun”* (Ecclesiastes 2:11).

However brilliant you may be, however distinguished your career, however much of a public servant, however many honours have been heaped upon you, you will perish as surely as any animal. Some people are instantly forgotten, some leave their mark on history. And yet, *“That which has been is what will be, that which is done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun”* (Ecclesiastes 1:9).

Christianity

What then is the Christian view? I want to compare this with the humanist view. Let’s start right at the beginning. The Bible insists that we are not here by accident. It begins with the story of creation brilliantly unfolding before our eyes. At its climax:

Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them (Genesis 1:26–27).

These are deceptively simple words, but their importance is profound. The first thing we read is that God decided to make man in His own image and in His likeness. But what does this mean? I suggest this has less to do with the physical attributes, and is rather referring to what we call the intellectual and spiritual faculties that human beings possess. The fact that we have a rational and moral mind makes a reasonable case to assert that humans are made in the image of God.

The natural progress of this idea is the question: how are we to develop these faculties which God has given us, in order to show that we are made in His image?

God’s Revelation

My answer is that God is revealed through His word, the Bible. I hope what I mean

by this becomes clear as we go on. He reveals His purpose, which no one can thwart, which is to fill the whole earth with goodness (for example Numbers 14:21, Habakkuk 2:12–14). But also God reveals Himself—His essence, if you will. He reveals to us something of His own nature. And if we are indeed in the image of God it is vital that we explore the ways that we can grasp this concept, because only by doing this will we realise our own true nature.

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of the religion of the Bible is how different it is from the contemporary religions of say, Babylon, Egypt, Greece or Rome. You may well be aware that the pagan gods of old were a pretty disreputable shower. You wouldn't want them as neighbours, let alone supreme beings. They argued, they rioted and cavorted, they got drunk and had fisticuffs with each other. In short they tended to behave like selfish and immature humans rather than all-powerful deities.



Contrast this with the God of Israel: “*And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say to them: “You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.”’*” (Leviticus 19:1–2). God is totally opposite from sin. He cannot lie. He

calls upon each of us to be truly good. In other words what God is, in His innermost being, is what human beings can become—holy.

Holiness

You may say that is all very well but what does it mean in practice? Leviticus 19 goes on to illustrate the answer, particularly in verses 9–18 and 32–37 where God tells Israel to show an unpatronizing care for the poor and refugee, and to treat their family and neighbours with respect.

This is an example of how the concept of holiness is translated into daily living. At every stage, and after almost every command come the words “*I am the LORD*”. In telling us to do good, He is telling us to reflect His nature.

Does this leave you with a feeling of inadequacy? Do you not believe that you can be ‘holy’? Don’t worry! God knows what we are capable of, but He also knows that we have a problem. We need now to consider the man who is at the very centre of God’s purpose—His Son Jesus Christ.

John’s Gospel introduces Jesus: “*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth*” (John 1:14). The Word of God, by which He created the world (Genesis 1:3), which speaks to us in the pages of the Bible, revealing not only God’s purpose but primarily His inmost nature, was perfectly revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. And so for the first time the glory of God, the

very image of God's own nature, was made clearly intelligible to human beings. When you look into the face of Jesus Christ, you see there the glory of God himself.

God, Who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become so much better than the angels, as he has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they (Hebrews 1:1-4).

The writer here shows us the majesty of Jesus Christ—the brightness of God's glory and the express image of His person. And what does it mean for us? By his sinless life and his death as a sacrifice, he 'purged our sins'. We do well to feel inadequate, we cannot be 'holy' by our own merits. But if we take advantage of the forgiveness which Christ has secured, we can be made holy by him (Colossians 1:14).

Life With A Purpose

Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (Matthew 16:24-25). This is the opposite of the humanists' concept of life as a way

of achieving self-realization and self-fulfilment. Christianity involves submitting yourself to God, so that you become ever more like Him in your attitude, thinking and behaviour.

The cross is, of course, the torture implement on which Jesus died (Matthew 27:32). Time and again in the Bible we see discipleship described with the language



of sacrifice. This is how the Apostle Paul described his own life: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the

flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

This is what gave Paul's life its essence and its goal. And in contrast to the humanist view, the goal of his life extended beyond his mere mortal existence, to the everlasting Kingdom which Christ will establish at his return: "Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing" (2 Timothy 4:8).

This is the purpose of life!

Malcolm Cross

The Governor's Memoir

Pontius Pilate was the Roman governor who sentenced Jesus Christ to death. This is an imaginary memoir, but it is based on the facts as we know them from the Bible and archaeology. The Bible verses are given for reference.



You can catch up with Part I at www.gladtidingsmagazine.org.

Part 2

IT WAS LATE morning when they returned from Herod's palace. I heard the babble of the crowd outside; my secretary informed me that the prisoner was waiting. I strode into the Praetorium, and there he was.

He was wrapped in the remains of a long gilt robe of purple and scarlet (Luke 23:11). There was an air of jollity among his guards, they smirked and winked. I grinned, and my henchmen chuckled. "It's the king of the Jews!" I pronounced, and they guffawed. I instructed my secretary to send a message of congratulation to Herod. I'd never before trusted the old fox, but now I saw he was prepared to have a joke at the Jews' expense, I respected him for that (Luke 23:12).

I regarded the prisoner. He regarded me. He stood there, bruised and dishevelled and dirt-streaked and almost comical in that pathetic royal outfit, but in his face a strange air of serenity. He had this way of looking at you that made you think he was looking through you, into your heart. I squirmed inwardly.

The priests wanted progress, they were waiting. I strode out into the portico and sat down on the judgement seat. They gathered around the balustrade. The guards pushed the prisoner before me. At sight of him the priests erupted into shouts and yells, scooping up handfuls of dust from the floor and flinging them into the air, hurling accusations at him. Even I could tell that there could be very little substance in the things they were shouting.

I watched him, curiously. Now would be the time to speak up and stop this. It was plain enough, even to me, that the simple reason for their hatred of him was envy (Matthew 27:18)—envy of his influence and popularity with the people. They had no case against him. With a few words he could demolish their accusations and humiliate them, it would be easily done.

But he just stood before them, meek and impassive. It was as though he was deliberately giving in.

My guards were edging forward, ready to move in and beat them back should they try to scale the balustrade. The situation was growing uglier, and I was impatient. “Do you answer nothing?” I shouted at him, struggling to make myself heard over the uproar: “See how many things they testify against you!”



He turned his gaze on me, and said nothing. I could not believe that it was possible for a man to be so composed and dignified in the face of such vicious provocation. I marvelled ([Mark 15:5](#)).

I needed to act. I motioned to the guard to pull the prisoner back and gestured to the crowd. A bad-tempered hush fell. “You have brought this man to me,” I said, “as one who misleads the people. And indeed, having examined him in your presence, I have found no fault in this man concerning those things of which you accuse him; no, neither did Herod, for I sent you back to him; and indeed nothing deserving of death has been done by him.” An indignant murmur broke out but I stilled it angrily. “I will therefore chastise him and release him” ([Luke 23:14-16](#)).

The priests roared with rage.

When I took on this post, I was warned what a troublesome lot the Jewish leaders were. Ungovernable, some said. I’d been

under no illusions about the job, it had been necessary to use force and bluster and in the half dozen years I’d been in the post I’d had numerous confrontations. I’d never known people like them, so passionately proud and nationalistic. They despised all foreigners, particularly Romans, and above all they despised me.

I could not resist goading them. “You have a custom

that I should release someone to you at the Passover. Do you therefore want me to release to you the king of the Jews?” ([John 18:39](#)). I nodded mockingly, first to them and then to the prisoner.

“Away with this man!” they shouted, “and release to us Barabbas!” ([Luke 23:18](#)).

I was afraid of that. Barabbas was in prison awaiting execution, he was the ringleader of a rebellion in the city—the crime of which they were accusing Jesus. But Barabbas was a political revolutionary and a killer. Not the kind of man I wanted roaming the streets of Jerusalem. How ironic that they’d prefer a man like Barabbas to this man.

In the midst of the uproar my secretary bustled over with a note. I snatched it impatiently, it was from my wife of all people. I slapped him for his stupidity, he smarted and explained that she had insisted I read it because it was of the utmost importance. I unfurled it: “Have

nothing to do with that just man, for I have suffered many things today in a dream because of him” ([Matthew 27:19](#)).

A prickle of cold sweat rose on my forehead. I felt as though I was losing control, I was caught up in something which somehow had its own momentum.

While I had been distracted the crowd was growing—the gaggle of priests with their officers and henchmen were now the nucleus of an ugly mob of locals and pilgrims who were running in from the city to see what the noise was about ([Matthew 27:20](#)). Many of them may have had little idea what was going on, but they were caught up in the fervour and they were fiercely loyal to the priests. I needed to put a swift end to this before a riot began.

“Which of the two do you want me to release to you?” I asked.

“Barabbas!” yelled the priests.

“What then do you want me to do with him whom you call the King of the Jews?”

“Crucify him!”

I was used to the rough realities of summary justice, I knew very well that convenience often won over truth, but I was taken aback by the sheer violence of their hatred. I shouted to make myself heard: “Why, what evil has he done? I have found no reason for death in him. I will therefore chastise him and let him go.” ([Luke 23:22](#)).

A yell of rage erupted from the mob in front of me. “Crucify him!” The crowd was infected with the venom of the priests and

the square rang to the sound of the chant, “Crucify him!”

I looked at the man. He stood there in front of them, shivering slightly, wilting with pain and fatigue, regarding the crowd. His face was blood-stained and hideously disfigured, a huge black bruise swelled around one eye. I looked for hatred, fear perhaps—but all I saw was sadness.

Looking back now, I know it was an empty gesture. But I was disgusted at the spectacle of this foul mob and I wanted nothing to do with their antics. I called for a bowl of water, and standing in front of them I washed my hands in it, and as they cat-called and jeered I bawled at them, “I am innocent of the blood of this just person. You see to it!” ([Matthew 27:24](#)).

Without hesitation the shout arose, “His blood be on us and on our children!” ([Matthew 27:25](#)). I can’t forget it, the recollection of that furious shout plagues me. Sometimes I can’t shut it out of my mind. It makes me afraid.

Katie Cabeira

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To be continued.



Born Free

'*BORN FREE*' is the name of a real-life story by a couple who raised an orphaned lioness cub to adulthood then released her into the Kenyan wilderness. The book was made into a film, whose title song chimes with a deep-seated human desire: "Born free and life is worth living, but only worth living 'cause you're born free."

Not everyone has freedom. Those who enjoy it should value it. At the inauguration of US President Joe Biden on 20th January 2021, the poet Amanda Gorman described herself as a black girl descended from slaves. In his address President Biden himself referred to two people concerned about freedom: Martin Luther King who is perhaps most famous for his 1963 speech about his 'dream' of 'freedom and justice', and Abraham Lincoln, whose Emancipation Declaration of 1863 ultimately led to the abolition of slavery in the USA. Lincoln had said that this was his proudest achievement: his 'whole soul' was in it. Referring to his new role as President, Joe Biden echoed these sentiments.

Slaves And Free

In the First Century, society in the Roman empire was rigidly hierarchical. At the bottom of the ladder were slaves (the Bible uses the word 'bondservant'), who were the property of their masters.

On the other hand, the apostle Paul was a Roman citizen by birth, which gave him several important civil rights. This citizenship was a tremendous honour:

Then the commander came and said to him, "Tell me, are you a Roman?" He said, "Yes." The commander answered, "With a large sum I obtained this citizenship." And Paul said, "But I was born a citizen" (Acts 22:27-28).

It is therefore remarkable that Paul, although 'free', was happy to describe himself as a bondservant of Jesus (for example Romans 1:1, Galatians 1:10, Titus 1:1). And he is not alone: other Christians are described as bondservants (Epaphras in Colossians 4:12; James in James 1:1; Peter in 2 Peter 1:1). What is even more remarkable is that Jesus himself willingly took on this role.

[Jesus] made himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men (Philippians 2:7).

So it is hardly surprising that Jesus' followers are happy to take on a similar role. But what does it actually mean?

We Are All Slaves

Paul was 'free born'. However, he understood that his freedom was an illusion. Paul said that he, and all of us, are naturally born as slaves: slaves to sin.

Sin is disobedience to God. God asks for obedience. Paul explains this in Romans 6:16–23, and his inspired argument is as follows:

We are all born as slaves to sin, following it instinctively, and on a course for death. If we obey the Gospel message we are released from our natural master ‘Sin’, and choose a new master ‘Righteousness’. We have the choice: we either serve one or the other. When serving righteousness we obey God and He considers us holy and is happy to give us His free gift of eternal life.

Consequently, by having faith in Jesus and a commitment to serving him, we can be free from the terrible consequences of the human nature we bear. We no longer do what we want, to please ourselves. Like the bond slave we do (or at least try to do) what Jesus wants, in absolutely everything. And then, by being his servant or slave, we can have amazing freedom.

In comparison with the yoke of sin and death, the yoke of Jesus is easy:



For my yoke is easy and my burden is light (Matthew 11:30).

Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be

entangled again with a yoke of bondage (Galatians 5:1).

And Jesus himself alluded to this:

Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed him, ‘If you abide in my word, you are my disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free’ (John 8:31–32).

Free To Choose

The song says: “Born free, as free as the wind blows, as free as the grass grows, born free to follow your heart.”

There are many honourable causes we could take up. Many things to which we could devote our ‘whole soul’, indeed ‘following our heart’. But Jesus was quite clear about what our priorities and commitment should be.

‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these (Mark 12: 30–31).

We are certainly free to make some choices about what we believe, how we spend our time, how we behave and what our focus is. To what will we devote our heart and soul? There is no higher or more honourable cause than to devote ourselves to serving the Lord God. This makes our life worth living not only now but throughout eternity. Let us put our ‘whole souls’ into doing that.

Anna Hart

Does Prayer Work?

THERE WAS A LARGE GROUP of them gathered together in a house, but this was no party. None of them smiled; some looked frightened and it was clear that they hadn't slept for some time. They had come together to pray, and had been doing so for hours. Sometimes they prayed in silence and sometimes one of them tried to put into words what they were all thinking.

It was the middle of the night. When the knock came, they all froze. After a pause, a girl went to see who was there. Before she could open the door, she heard a familiar voice from outside. Instead of opening up, she dashed back to the others waiting in the house. "Rhoda, what is it?", asked one of them. She was grinning from ear to ear and could hardly speak. "It's Peter!" she gasped. The others shook their heads sadly. It couldn't be Peter. He was in prison, due to be executed the next day. That was why they had gathered together to pray for him. But the knocking continued.

Rhoda wouldn't be silenced. "It is! It's him! Come and see!" she shouted, grabbing hold of the nearest arm. When they reached the entrance, they could hear laughter. Drawing back the bolts, they opened the heavy wooden door and there was Peter, looking highly amused. "Didn't you think your prayers might be answered?"



You can read the full story in Acts chapter 12. Many times in the Bible we read of people praying. Their despair, joy, fear, trust, hope or gratitude come across clearly. It is never the wrong time to pray. But we can't assume that God's answer will be "yes" all the time, which is why some think praying is a waste of time.

Think of it as a parent knowing what their child needs. Sometimes the child asks for things that would be a bad idea. They don't like it when the answer is "no", but the parent is actually showing love by denying the request. God's answer might not be what we expect. But hindsight will reveal that He has cared for us, even through the darkest times.

Rachel Leah

Questions? Comments?
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JG writes:

“Will God forgive all sins we commit in the future, including sins we do not confess and sins we do not realise we have committed? And what about sins we deliberately commit?”

This is the second of two questions on the crucial subject of sin and forgiveness. You can find the first question at www.gladtidingsmagazine.org.

THE DEATH OF the Lord Jesus Christ is effective to forgive sins for those who are in a covenant relationship with God. In the last issue we saw that the key requirements for forgiveness are:

- understanding and believing the Gospel as revealed in the Bible
- repentance
- baptism (by immersion in water)
- and then a life lived in harmony with God’s commandments.

But what happens if we continue to sin after our baptism?

More Sin, More Grace?

When God forgives sins it is an act of ‘grace’—undeserved favour. It seems that some people in the apostle Paul’s day were suggesting that it must therefore be good to commit sins, because it enables

God to show more grace. In his letter to the Romans he refuted this faulty logic (Romans 6:1). “*How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?*” (v. 2). Throughout the rest of this chapter—which is worth reading in full—he goes on to describe what baptism is and how it works. Baptism is a symbolic burial (in water) and resurrection to a new life. The Christian must live as though they have actually put to death their old way of life with its godless inclinations and attitudes:

Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:11).

He does not say that our old sinful way of life has died and will give us no further trouble. He says that we should consider it to have died and should now live differently, being alive to the teaching and influence of Jesus. He then uses a very strong figure indeed when he says that baptised believers should think of themselves as “*slaves of God*” (verse 22). The idea is that God commands and we

obey, just as obedient slaves did in a First Century household.

Confessing Our Sin

Whilst we struggle to die to the impulses and temptations latent in our nature, or in the various circumstances of our lives, it is a fact that after we have been baptised we will sin again and again. The apostle John makes that clear when he says:

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us (1 John 1:8–10).

Confession is clearly important if God is to continue to forgive us, and these verses ask us to recognise that we cannot claim to be sinless now or say that we have never sinned in the past. Instead, when we sin we should pray to God for His gracious and merciful forgiveness. John goes on to say that Jesus died to make that ongoing forgiveness possible, and that he is now continuing his work as a mediator, or intercessor, obtaining forgiveness for his disciples:

My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous (1 John 2:1).

Jesus is an ‘Advocate’ in the presence of God in heaven, standing for us men and women who sin and need the forgiveness

he worked so hard to achieve. In his pattern prayer, Jesus instructed his disciples to ask God for forgiveness, but he made that request conditional:

Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors (Matthew 6:11–12, see also verses 14–15).



These verses are a double reminder to his disciples that when we ask God for forgiveness, which we should do on a regular basis, we should be forgiving to others who might have upset or offended us. And the apostle John goes on to explain that when we have become God’s people (or “his slaves”) we should stop living in a way which can be described as ‘practising sin’: “Whoever abides in him does not sin” (1 John 3:6). This is better translated in another Bible version as “No one who abides in him keeps on sinning” (ESV).

Deliberate Sin

If anyone, including people who have been baptised as Jesus’ disciples, should choose a path through life which is in flagrant defiance of God’s commandments, then

they should not expect God to forgive them until they cease from that behaviour. This is what another apostle says about such conduct:

For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? (Hebrews 10:26–29).

“Wilful sin” is translated in other versions as “persistent sin” (NEB), or to “go on sinning deliberately” (ESV). So the apostle is warning that those who have been forgiven their sins must try to live before God in a way that respects Him and complies with His laws.

None of us is perfect. All of us sin, in different ways and at different times. We may not mean to do things that we know are wrong, but sometimes it's difficult to know whether we did something deliberately or just because our nature got the better of us. This is how the apostle Paul described his own experience at times when he felt that his life was out of control:

For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no

longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me (Romans 7:19–20).

His deliverance from that tension, he goes on to say, comes from the knowledge that he can be forgiven through the saving work of the Lord Jesus (verses 24–25).

Man Apart

The Lord Jesus was tempted in all the ways that we too are tempted, but he never once succumbed (Hebrews 4:15). He alone lived a perfect life, so that we can have our sins forgiven and be made right with God. What a precious gift that is, by the grace and goodness of God.

Jesus is now in heaven to make it possible for his disciples to have access to God in prayer, and when he returns to earth—this time to rule as king—he will call them to him and ask them to give an account of their lives (Romans 14:10). So, we must try and live every day as sinners who have been forgiven and who want to see that forgiveness expressed when we are summoned to our King and are gifted eternal life.

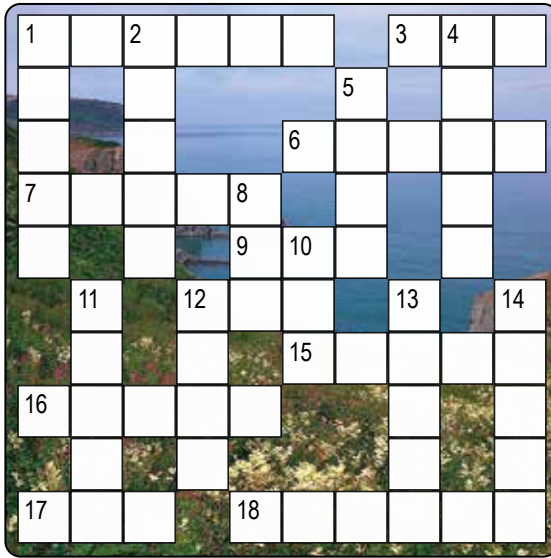
I once asked a colleague about his ambition and he simply said: “I want to kneel before the Lord Jesus when he comes and see him smile.” Don't we all!

Tecwyn Morgan



Across

- 1 Peter was brought out of this by an angel (Acts 12:17)
- 3 "And his chains fell ___ his hands" (Acts 12:7)
- 6 The father of the writer of Ecclesiastes (Ecclesiastes 1:1)
- 7 This will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD (Habakkuk 2:14)
- 9 Reverential fear (Psalm 119:161)
- 12 A good king of Judah (1 Kings 15:11)
- 15 She went to the door when Peter knocked (Acts 12:13)
- 16 The angel told Peter to do this (Acts 12:7)
- 17 Can you do this to your stature by worrying? (Matthew 6:27)
- 18 There is a time to cast these away and a time to gather them (Ecclesiastes 3:5)



Down

- 1 He was sleeping when an angel struck him (Acts 12:7)
- 2 Solomon's throne was made of this (1 Kings 10:18)
- 4 The just will live by this (Habakkuk 2:4)
- 5 Peter knocked at the door of this (Acts 12:13)
- 8 "Now I know for certain that the Lord ___ sent his angel" (Acts 12:11)
- 10 There is a time for this and a time for peace (Ecclesiastes 3:8)
- 11 After mocking Jesus, this ruler sent him back to Pilate (Luke 23:11)
- 12 In addition (Habakkuk 1:8)
- 13 There is a time to do this and a time to dance (Ecclesiastes 3:4)
- 14 Pilate washed these, saying that he was innocent of Jesus' blood (Matthew 27:24)

Colin Jannaway

(These clues use the New King James version of the Bible. If you're using another version some words may not be quite the same.)

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