

Spiritual Blessings



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“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.” Eph. 1:3

We Must Apologise!

By Athol Walter.

What was your reaction when you read the title of this article? Maybe you thought: “We? Is he saying that I have done something to apologise for? No way!” Or perhaps it was: “What has the BBFA been up to that they must apologise? This will be good.” There will have been some of our readers, however, who would have thought, with a slight smile on their faces: “I know what he’s up to.” We’ll come to that in a moment.

Whenever we hear the word ‘apologise’, we immediately think of saying sorry for something we have done wrong. There was one occasion in my high school years, when a mate and I were sent to the Deputy Headmaster because we had been making a nuisance of ourselves in class. The Deputy sent us back to Miss Smith to apologise for our behaviour. We faced Miss Smith and said, “Mr. Carpenter said we had to apologise.” Her response was, “No, that is not good enough. Go away, and come back when you mean it.” Did we ever go back? That’s for me to know, and for you to wonder about.

The English word ‘apologise’ has come into English from Greek almost unchanged, and the fact that it originally meant something quite different to how we use it today is a very good example of how words not only change in meaning over time, but also that the changes are predominantly a lessening or downgrading of the meaning. So let’s do some digging and find out what sort of an apology it is that we all must make.

The Scripture verse with which I want to start is 1 Peter 3:15:-

“But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defence to everyone who asks you

a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear ...” (NKJV). I suggest you read v. 16 as well.

The word ‘defense’ in that verse is the Greek word ‘apologia’, and we don’t need a university degree to recognise our word ‘apology’ in it. It is translated in the New Testament either by ‘defence’ or ‘answer’, and what Peter is saying is that believers should be ready (which implies the ability to do so) to give reasons to those who ask, for the great truths of our Faith.

So the challenge for us is this. How ready are we to give clear, cogent answers to any who either ask us about our faith, or who attack the Christian Faith. When we give reasons and/or answers for our faith, we are ‘apologising’ in the original sense, and have entered the field of ‘Apologetics’, which, repeating myself for the sake of clarity, does not mean to say sorry in any way.

There are two occurrences of the word in Acts which clearly illustrate its meaning. First, Acts 22:1. Paul had been assaulted by a mob of Jews because they thought he had defiled the Temple. The Roman guard rescued him, and the Centurion allowed him to address the crowd.

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President's Word

Greetings once again to all of our readers around the world.

There's never enough space in this regular column to discuss all that's happening in the BBFA, so here's just a sample of what's been going on, and what's coming up.

Tasmania Study Weekend

Following Michael Penny's series of meetings in Tasmania last October, the BBFA conducted a weekend of Bible studies at Penguin (near Burnie) in March of this year. Karl Edwards and I were the speakers and we presented talks on the Second Coming of Christ, His deity and humanity, Miracles Today, the Transfiguration, and more. These meetings were well attended, and we must thank the Young and Spicer families for looking after us all so well. It is hoped we can meet there again around March 2012, so if you live on the mainland and are thinking of taking a trip to Tasmania, Autumn is a lovely time of the year to visit (hint, hint).

Bible Study, Fellowship and Books Galore

Saturday June 11th, 2011 is our next Bible Study and Fellowship Day in the Newcastle/Maitland area. Athol Walter will speak, and possibly one other speaker. The venue address is the Pat Hughes Memorial Centre, Taylor Avenue, Thornton (opposite the school, and next to the shopping centre). 10.00 a.m. to 3.00 p.m. There is no charge to attend, and lunch will be provided, as always.

This will be a day with a difference, as we will also bring out ALL of our available book stocks, which amounts to hundreds (yes, hundreds) of titles. Books by Dr. E. W. Bullinger, Charles Welch, Michael Penny and many others will all be reduced or free. Most items will be available at a fraction of the normal cost, and some we are just giving away. It will be a rare occasion, as I don't think we have ever put all the titles out at once, and we may not do it again.

Many readers will know that no one in our Fellowship profits financially from the sale of books. Our attitude is that it is of far more value to have good Bible study literature in people's hands than

for it to just sit in storage - and we are running out of storage space. So come along and find some great books for yourself, or pick up some inexpensive titles to give away. Come for the Bible study, join us for a free lunch, chat with fellow believers, take home some good reading - one day only: Sat. June 11th 2011.

Brisbane Study Day / Weekend

In the previous issue of Spiritual Blessings, it was mentioned that a Brisbane study conference would be finalised by the time this issue was sent out. We had planned to meet in May, but those dates turned out to be unworkable. Co-ordinating a date and a suitable venue has proved elusive so far; consequently, the date for this meeting has been put on hold temporarily. Anyone interested in attending such a meeting in Brisbane should contact Frank Haegler by phone on (07) 3297 1981, or by email at frank@spiritualblessings.org for the latest available information about this.

Annual Conference

This year, the BBFA's Annual Conference will be at Bethshan Conference Centre, Wyee (near Morisset, NSW Central Coast). For the last few years, we have met at Toukley, which was a good venue. However, changes in the camp's policies for overnight campers do not meet our needs, hence the change of venue. Bethshan has undergone changes in management and facilities since we were there in 2003, and it is now a suitable site for our conferences. The dates are Sept. 24-26, 2011, so please plan to join us for a weekend of Bible study and fellowship.

Finally, thanks to all who continue to support our ministry through prayer, donations, attendance at our meetings, regular offerings, personal encouragement and advice, passing our Bible study material on to others, or by some other means not always known to us. An "Optional Subscription" form was sent out with our last issue - many people responded and for this we express our gratitude. It is a fact of life that it costs money to publish and distribute a magazine, host a website, conduct public meetings, etc., and the support of our members and friends helps us to keep doing such things. Your help has not gone unappreciated, and we say, "Thank You!".

Until next time, may the Lord be glorified by our walk, our witness, and the study of His Word.

David Tavender

cont from Pg. 1

He started by saying: “Brethren and fathers, hear my defence (apologia) before you now.” Paul was not saying sorry for anything he had done, but rather was giving the reasons for his actions, and indeed, his manner of life.

The second verse is Acts 25:16, where Festus is explaining events surrounding Paul’s arrest etc. to King Agrippa:

“To them I answered, ‘It is not the custom of the Romans to deliver any man to destruction before the accused meets the accusers face to face, and has opportunity to answer (apologia) for himself concerning the charge against him’.” Again, there is no thought that Paul is to say sorry.

Returning for a moment to the verse I quoted from 1 Peter, some readers may have thought that because 1 Peter is not a mystery epistle, it is not for us today? That is often true, but not in this case. There are basic doctrines and principles in Scripture that are not exclusive to any one dispensation. These apply at all times, and I think that what Peter says here is one of those ‘across-the-board’ principles. Paul has a word in Philippians, which certainly is relevant. We find it in Phil. 1:7:

“... inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defence (apologia) and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace.” It looks as if Paul expected members of the Body to share with him in defending the Faith. Paul has a further word to say on the matter, which we will come to later.

Before we go any further, I think we should note, and emphasise, the last phrase of 1 Peter 3:15. It tells us that we should make our ‘apologies’ for our faith “**with meekness and fear**”.

We readily understand the word meekness, but what about the word fear? The Amplified Version has this: “Always be ready to give a logical defence to any one who asks you ... but do it courteously and respectfully.” I think that catches the spirit of the words. I know very well that I need to heed and apply those words in my own efforts to ‘apologise’.

Consider now the field of Apologetics. We are fortunate that there are many books to help us sort

out the reasons behind and for our faith, and to present those reasons in logical and sensible ways. These books also show us ways of answering the critics by exposing the holes in their arguments.

Defending the Faith is not something new, as is shown by the example of Stephen. Acts 6:9 & 10 says that Jews from several synagogues in Jerusalem disputed with Stephen, but they were unable to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spoke. This was the reason why they dragged him off to the Sanhedrin, making false accusations against him. Then, in spite of his brilliant ‘apology’ (ch. 7), he was taken outside the city and stoned to death. Saul, who we know better as Paul, was at that stoning, and it would seem that he was one of those Jews in the synagogues who had not been able to refute Stephen’s witness.

Paul was not saying sorry for anything he had done ...

One of the best known books on Apologetics is “The New Evidence That Demands A Verdict” by Josh McDowell. I strongly recommend it. It has helped me a great deal in discussions with atheists and evolutionists, amongst others. To give some examples: To those who deny that there are any absolute truths or morals and claim that all truth is relative, ask either, “Are you **absolutely** sure about that?”, or, “Relative to what?”. Josh gives a beautiful quote that says, “All relativists stand on the absolute truth that all truth is relative.” I would never have thought of those responses in a lifetime.

Some eastern religions claim that everything we can see and feel around us is not real but only an illusion. So we may ask them, why then, if that bus coming down the road is only an illusion, do they dodge it. As one Indian man said after his conversion to Christianity, “I realised one day that my religion was impossible to live by.”

There are many critics of the Bible who say that truth cannot be known. The simple response is, “Then how do you know that?” Obviously, they believe their statement to be truth that can be known! Again, Sceptics say that one must be sceptical about all dogmatic statements, so taking them at their word, we should be very sceptical of what they say.

Another book which I have found very helpful, and enjoyable to read, is “I Don’t Have Enough Faith To Be An Atheist”. What a marvellous title! Written by Norman L. Geisler and Frank Turek, the book systematically deals with attacks that atheists make on the Bible and Christian beliefs, pointing out the errors and illogicality of their arguments. The basic point they make is that it takes much more blind faith to be an atheist than to be a Christian.

Some wonderful chapter headings are: New Life Forms: From the Goo to You via the Zoo?; Mother Teresa vs. Hitler; Miracles: Signs of God or Gullibility? The authors also cover such subjects as “Why Should Anyone Believe Anything At All?”; “Do We Have Early Testimony About Jesus?”; and “The Top Ten Reasons We Know The New Testament Writers Told The Truth”. The vexed question of how evil can exist if God is good is also dealt with head-on.

In the chapter titled “Mother Teresa vs. Hitler”, the authors make the point that people who assert there are no absolute morals, do not live their lives according to that belief. They say that because these same folk will become very upset if they are not treated in an ethical or fair way. So, say the authors, it is not what a person says – or even their treatment of other people – that shows whether they believe in absolute moral values, but rather their reactions to what others do to them. For example, a man might say that he believes the biblical standard of fidelity in marriage is outdated poppycock, but watch how he reacts if he discovers that his wife has been unfaithful to him! This is a book which I think you will find yourself dipping into again and again.

The New Atheists

The so-called “New Atheists”, such as Richard Dawkins, Peter Atkins and Christopher Hitchens, who attack Christianity in a very aggressive manner, have found a ready and sympathetic reception from the world media, as well as a ready market for their books. It sometimes seems that Christianity has lost out completely. Yet, there are at least five excellent books from Christian authors that show logically and clearly, the many flaws in the assumptions and reasoning of these critics. Yet the general media do not announce these books to the public, for that

would not fit their basic position that religion, particularly Christianity, has no foundation of truth.

A few titles out of many that refute Richard Dawkins are: “The Dawkins Letters” by David Robertson; “Dealing With Dawkins” by John Blanchard; “Why There Almost Certainly Is A God: Doubting Dawkins” by Keith Ward (the title is a play on a chapter title in Dawkins’ book “The God Delusion”). Another great book is “The Dawkins Delusion” by Alister McGrath. Obviously a play on Dawkins’ title. Each of these titles is filled with helpful material.

The brother of Christopher Hitchens, Peter, has published a book recently with the title “The Rage Against God: How Atheism Led Me To Faith”. Peter grew up as a convinced atheist, very much against Christianity. However, as an adult he went to live in Communist Russia for some years and after a while, as he saw the terrible results of atheism at work, he turned his back on it and became a committed Christian. His book is a wonderful read.

Another prolific writer in the field of Christian Apologetics is Lee Strobel, who also was once an atheist. Amongst his books are “The Case For Christ”; “The Case For Faith”; and “The Case For A Creator”. He makes a point in “The Case For Faith” which I would like to share, as it contains a serious challenge for us. He says: “I remember as an atheist peppering ill-prepared Christians with a flurry of apparent biblical contradictions and discrepancies. They would get flustered and embarrassed because they couldn’t answer them, and I’d walk away feeling smug and self-satisfied.” If you are one of ‘the flustered and embarrassed Christians’, it is time to do something about it. Not all of us can be top-line debaters like these authors, but each one of us, with some dedication and work, can equip ourselves to do much better when we are called upon to make our defence.

A word of warning on this point, and I speak to myself here also. The reason why we are to give reasonable and reasoned answers for our faith is not that we may vanquish our critics, and be the ones to walk away feeling “smug and self-satisfied”, but that we may be used by the Lord to cause some of

It sometimes seems as if Christianity has lost out completely!

these critics to think again, examine the evidence for the Bible and its message, and perhaps, by the grace of God, come to faith in Christ, as many of the authors mentioned herein have done.

There are many other books and DVDs available, dealing with such subjects as evolution, science and Faith, Intelligent Design, and the reliability of the Bible. Visit your local Christian Book Store and dive into the section on Apologetics. I suspect you will be lost there for an hour or two.

I cannot conclude without mentioning C. S. Lewis, the well-known author of the Narnia series which has so captured the imagination of many. He, too, came out of atheism and proved to be a wonderful Christian apologist. He is quoted frequently in the books already mentioned. Two of his books to start with, if you are not familiar with them already, are "Mere Christianity" and "Surprised By Joy". I once thought that the title referred to his wife, Joy Davidman, but it is the account of his journey from atheism to Christianity.

The other passage by Paul that I referred to earlier is 2 Tim. 2:24-26, and it is a most suitable conclusion to this article:

"And 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, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will." ❖

BIBLE STUDY & FELLOWSHIP DAY

Saturday June 11th. 2011

Venue: Pat Hughes Memorial Centre, Taylor Ave, THORNTON (near Maitland) NSW.

(Opp.school and next to shopping centre)

Time: 10am to 3pm.

Admission free. Lunch provided.

Huge bookstall - all prices reduced.

Stimulating studies faithful to God's Word.

Editorial

We send out this issue of Spiritual Blessings praying that it will not only be of interest and help to readers, but above all, pleasing to the Lord and useful for His purposes.

I am delighted to be able to say that there has been a good response to Karl Edward's article 'Who's The You?', in the last issue. Jan Lilleby, in Norway, wishes to translate it into Norwegian to be used in his witness. Many local readers have also expressed their appreciation of Karl's study. In addition, a reader in Holland has written expressing his appreciation for the encouragement and blessing he gets from the magazine in general.

In this issue, I wax eloquent about the important subject of Apologetics. I know we are not all alike, but I get great enjoyment, as well as much enlightenment and help, from the various books available on the subject. It is rather surprising that many of the leading writers on Apologetics have come out of atheism or agnosticism to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Who better than people such as these to provide answers to the attacks of the enemies of God and His Word! With the books available, there is no reason for any of us to be hesitant about giving answers for our faith.

Then we have the first article in a series on Acts by John Hutton. John is a member of our Newcastle fellowship and in this introductory study, gives an uncompromising witness to the reliability of God's Word and the need to rightly divide it. In this series, he goes right back to the fundamentals.

Don't forget, if you have any questions or comments about anything you read in Spiritual Blessings, pick up your pen, or fire up the internet, and get in touch. We would be glad to hear from you. Relevant addresses are on the back page.

I pray that you are apprehending more and more every spiritual blessing that is yours in Christ. As I get older, I realise that I know only a fraction of what God has done for me in Christ Jesus, but I am growing in grace and in the knowledge of Him who loved me and gave Himself for me. Hallelujah! What a Saviour!

Athol Walter.

The Reliability Of The Bible

By John Hutton, Newcastle

(This article is a preliminary study to a series on the Book of Acts. John is currently giving this series at the Newcastle meeting, and they are worthy of a much wider audience. The actual study of Acts will start in the next issue, but first, John has a few words to say on the place of the Bible itself.)

Before we begin a study of the book of Acts, I want to look at the reliability of Scripture, something that you all know and have heard before, but I don't think it hurts us to be reminded of things we learned years ago.

Point 1

'... But when the fourteenth night was come, as we were driven up and down in Adria, about midnight the shipmen deemed that they drew near to some country'. (Acts 27:27)

In Acts 27:13–27, we read that, on the way to Rome, the ship that Paul was travelling on encountered a very big wind. It was a sailing ship and the wind was so strong that the ship could not cope with it. If you have ever had anything to do with sailing boats, you will know that the power of the wind and waves can be frightening.

Verses 15, 17 & 27 tell us that they were driven up and down the coast and had no power to do anything about it. There is no mention in the original texts of verse 17 about a heavy anchor. If there was an anchor, it had no effect or they wouldn't have been driven up and down the coast. The point I am making is that they could do nothing about the direction that the ship was taking. The wind decided that.

Now look at 2 Peter 1:20:

'Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation'.

For 'private interpretation', the NIV has, 'prophet's own interpretation'. Did Isaiah, for example, understand the things he wrote about? I'm sure that he did as far as they dealt with circumstances at the time in which he wrote them. But what about the times in the New Testament when the Lord, or one

of the apostles, quotes him and says that this is what Isaiah was really writing about all of those years ago? I'm sure that Isaiah would have been surprised and even shocked at the real meaning of some of his prophesies.

Now, if the words that the writers of Scripture were not their own interpretation of what God was saying, then surely those words must mean only what God intended them to mean. In spite of what happens in many Bible study groups, where those present are asked what the particular passage means to them, we must do all we can to discover what God means by the passage.

1 Pet. 2:21

'For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost'.

The word 'moved' in v. 21 and 'driven' in Acts 27:27 are the same Greek word in both passages. The writers of Scripture did not decide what they would write, they wrote what the Holy Spirit drove them to write. What were they driven to write? Surely the words of God!

Point 2

Words, and the way we use them, are very important. Think about the care necessary when we sign a contract. Look at the problems many folk, affected by the natural disasters in Queensland recently, are having with their insurance companies over the interpretation of words used. Does God use words lightly? I don't think so!

Turn to Psalm 12:6

'The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times'.

If that is true, then God's words are sure and reliable.

Turn to John 17:17.

'Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth'.

If God's word and words can be interpreted any way that satisfies the likes and dislikes of the reader, we should not be surprised at the confused state of Christendom today, should we?

Turn to 1 Cor. 1 Cor. 2:13

'Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. ¹³Which things also we speak' – Stop here: what do we use when we speak? Words! – 'not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth' – Stop once more: What does the Holy Ghost teach with? – Words! – 'comparing spiritual things' - What things? Words! 'with spiritual.' - spiritual words!

Let me quote the NIV:

'This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom, but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words'.

Which is the better translation, however, 'expressing spiritual truths' or 'comparing spiritual words'? Let us compare the way the Holy Spirit uses the same Greek word – 'sunkrino' – translated both as 'expressing' and 'compared'.

Turn to 2 Cor. 10:12.

'For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise'.

I think, therefore, that the words 'expressing' and 'truths' are interpretation rather than translation.

If you want get some understanding of what a verse of Scripture is talking about, what is the best

way of going about it? First of all, look at what the word means, not the English word in the version that you are using, but the word in the original language, and see how the Holy Ghost has used it. Compare spiritual words with spiritual words. Commentaries can be very useful, but the greatest commentary on the Bible is what? The Bible itself!

You can argue with me if you like, but I believe that when you study the Bible without the use of a Greek text and an Englishman's Greek concordance handy, you are doing God's Word a disservice, and are less likely to come to a true meaning of what you are reading.

Point 3

Turn to 2 Tim. 2:15:

'Study to shew thyself approved unto God...'

Before we finish the verse turn to 2 Tim 4:9:

'Do thy diligence to come shortly unto me'.

and Verse 21:

'Do thy diligence to come before winter'.

The word 'study' in 2 Tim. 2:15 and 'Do thy diligence' in 4:9 and 4:21 translate the same Greek word, 'Be diligent'. If you are being diligent about something, what are doing about it? You are doing your best to get it right or to do it right! The NIV translates 2 Tim. 2:15, 'do your best' – and this time it has got it right. Another way of saying it is 'put yourself out'.

Now back to 2 Tim. 2:15:

'Do your best, put yourself out' to show yourself approved unto God a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth'.

What is the Word of truth? John 17:17 tells us:

'Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth'.

Up until the death and resurrection of Christ, the word of God given to man was what we call the Old Testament. If God loved mankind so much that He was willing to give His own dearly beloved Son for

them, i.e. for us, don't you think that the Lord would have given man, i.e. us, warning that some parts of the Old Testament were at best unreliable, and at worst untrue, if that was the case?

But during His earthly ministry, the Lord doesn't question the creation, the existence of Noah and his story, the existence and prophecies of either Jonah, or Daniel, or anyone else in the Old Testament. On the other hand, many theologians and believers today do.

Some of those theologians, for example, tell us that two people wrote Isaiah. The first 40 or so chapters were written by Isaiah, they say, and the remaining chapters were written by 'pseudo-Isaiah'. But the Lord quoted from the different parts of Isaiah, ascribing it all to the one man.

I accept the Old Testament as being the word and words of God and that they are trustworthy, because our Lord never once questioned them as being untrue or unreliable.

What about the New Testament?

Turn to 2 Peter 3:15-16

'... and account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; ¹⁶As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction'.

Peter was a Jew who knew the Scriptures and would have been shattered if the Lord had ever suggested that they were unreliable. Peter had also been with the Lord all through His ministry, and had been instructed by the Lord for 40 days after His resurrection. Not only that, but Peter also had 'the eyes of his understanding opened that he might understand the Scriptures' (Luke 24:45). So Peter would have understood what the Lord was saying!

What is Peter saying, then, about the writings of Paul in the verse above? He is placing Paul's writings on the same level as the Old Testament.

Peter said that men were wresting (or twisting) Paul's words as they did with the other Scriptures and he condemned them for that, although he admits that some of Paul's teachings were hard to understand.

Now another question arises. Can we trust that the books included in the New Testament are really what God wants us to have?

Here is a quote about the Canon of the New Testament from an article on 'The Canon of the Bible' in 'The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology':

'The formation of the NT canon was not a conciliar decision (i.e. not a decision made by a Council). The earliest ecumenical council at Nicea, in 325AD, did not discuss the canon. The first undisputed decision of a council on the canon seems to be from Carthage in 397AD, which decreed that nothing should be read in the church under the name of divine Scriptures except the canonical writings. The twenty seven books of the New Testament were then listed as the canonical writings. The council could list only those books that were generally regarded by the concensus of use as properly a canon. The formation of the NT canon must therefore be regarded as a process rather than an event, and a historical rather than a biblical matter. The coming of the Word of God in print is only slightly more capable of explication than the coming of the Word of God incarnate.'

I've asked a lot of questions and here is another one. Who do you think decided on the selected 27 books, the church leaders at any time in history or the Holy Spirit?

A comment on the above quote, which deserves passing on, is this: 'The writer makes an interesting point, which really contradicts the accusation of

sceptics that the Church leaders foisted the books they wanted onto the gullible faithful’.

I was converted in The Salvation Army as a young teenager, and have never forgotten their first doctrine. It says: “We believe that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments were given by inspiration of God and that they only constitute the Divine rule of Christian faith and practice”.

If that is true – and I believe unreservedly that it is – then every word from Genesis 1:1 to the last word in Revelation is not only inspired, but must be of equal inspiration. When I realised what that doctrine was really saying, I was staggered. If some of it is not God’s word, which parts are and which parts are not? Are the parts I like the inspired parts, or are the parts my church teaches as unquestionable the inspired parts? If it is not all of equal inspiration, which parts are and which parts are not? Can we trust some of it but not others? If the Bible is not all true and all of equal inspiration, what are we going to do? Why study the Bible at all? I know what I would do if I doubted that the Bible was absolutely reliable – I’d throw it in the bin. What would you do?

Turn to Col. 1:25.

‘Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God’.

Paul tells us that the revelation of the Mystery given after the book of Acts finished—or filled full, or filled up, or completed—the Scriptures.

The Greek word for fulfil is ‘pleroma’, which means to ‘fill up’ or ‘fill full’. In its context in this verse it means to ‘complete’.

What is this dispensation that completes Scripture?

Col. 1:26.

‘Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints’.

When did you last hear, or have you ever heard, a sermon on the revelation of the mystery or secret which had been hidden from ages and from generations, which fulfils Scripture?

Look at Christendom. We have Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Russian Orthodox, High Church of England, Low Church of England, various Baptist faiths, Uniting Church, Salvation Army, Pentecostal, Dispensational groups, to name just some, and then all of the way out cults and sects like the followers of the late Jim Jones. These all teach different things and argue with each other. What a marvellous witness to the Lord it all is!

Let me state an obvious fact. The various denominations cannot all be right in everything that they teach, can they? I know there are many things on which they agree, but why are there differences? Are they all wrong except the one you or I belong to? How can we know what is right and what is wrong? Has Christendom missed the revelation of the Mystery?

2 Cor. 11:15

‘And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. ¹⁵Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness’.

If Satan is an angel of light and his ministers are ministers of righteousness, where will they be active?

There could be an even more serious shortcoming, however, than not seeing something in Scripture.

Ignatious Loyola was the founder of the Roman Catholic order, ‘the Society of Jesus’ or the ‘Jesuits’. He said this, ‘I will believe that the white that I see is black, if the hierarchical Church says so.’

But what is the correct attitude for the believer; to believe the words of God or what my Church tells me it means without question?

Back to 2 Tim. 2:15

‘Do your best, put yourself out’, to show yourself approved unto God a workman that

needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth’.

We will not talk about what it means to ‘rightly divide the Scripture’ tonight, but we probably will at the end of our study of Acts.

Let me ask this question. If I do my best, if I put myself out in my endeavours to rightly divide the Word of God, what will I be considered by God? **An ‘unashamed workman’, an approved workman of His!**

If I do not do my best, if I do not put myself out, if I do not learn how to rightly divide the Word of God, whatever that may mean, what will I be considered by God? **An ‘ashamed workman’, an unapproved workman of His!** We are not talking about a little matter, are we? If I am an ashamed workman in His sight, what words may I never have a chance of hearing? ‘Well done, you good and faithful servant’.

Verse 16

‘But shun profane and vain babblings’ - what are profane and vain babblings? Anything that is not the truth – **‘for they will increase unto more ungodliness. ¹⁷And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; ¹⁸Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some’.**

What should my attitude be to what I hear about God and His ways? Turn to Acts 17:1-4,

‘Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews: ²And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, ³Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ. ⁴And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few’.

What was the attitude of the Jews who did not believe?

Verses 5-9

‘But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. ⁶And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also; ⁷Whom Jason hath received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus. ⁸And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things. ⁹And when they had taken security of Jason, and of the other, they let them go, And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews.’

Things were pretty bad in Thessalonica and Paul had to escape to Berea.

Verse 10

‘These (i.e. the Jews in Berea) were more noble than those in Thessalonica ... What made them ‘more noble’? – **‘They were more noble in that (or because) they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so’.**

This is why we use the word ‘Berean’ in the name of our Fellowship. We want to copy those Jews of Berea who listened to Paul’s words, and then compared what he said with the Scriptures to see whether what he said was true.

There is coming a time when we will all stand before the Lord to give an account of ourselves. If I use the excuse that I have believed something because that is what my Church or group taught me, what might the Lord’s answer be? Possibly something like this: ‘I will deal with that Church, but

you can read and if you had put yourself out to see if what your Church was saying was correct or not, you would have discovered that what you were taught was wrong'. Bible Study is a dangerous thing! What should be our response if the Holy Spirit points out that something that we absolutely believed is wrong?

I believe that in the Bible we have all the words – all the words – that God wants us to have and that they are absolutely reliable. ❖

A Dispensational Witness in Norway

This report of a recent seminar in Norway, was forwarded by Jan Lilleby, who gave four one-hour studies on fundamental Dispensational Truth.

“On Saturday, April 9, a seminar was held in Kristiansand, under the title, “With Paul Through The New Testament”. Jan Lilleby was the guest speaker. The reason for the seminar is to promote interest in reading the Bible dispensationally and learning of its different dispensations. We have also learnt much from the literature of Jan Lilleby on these topics.

The audience was made up of believers from denominations and churches in the area, and the feedback received is unanimously positive. The folk want more seminars like this one.

We greatly appreciated Jan's clear and distinct teaching throughout the day, and many have been inspired to do further study of the issues .

The seminar was by all measures successful. We only wish that more believers could have heard this important message. But we hope to be able to achieve that goal another time.

We pray that God's grace will continue to enable Jan Lilleby to carry on his important ministry and that many will be richly blessed through it.

Regards, Odd Guttormsen and Jostein Gundersen, Conveners.”

Jan supplied some more details, viz. twenty people attended; the subjects covered were The New Covenant was for Israel exclusively; Israel's hope was the earthly Kingdom; Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles; and The Christian Hope is Heaven far above all. Another seminar is being planned for the coming northern autumn. Please pray for this work.. ❖

Why Acts?

By the Editor.

As noted at the beginning of John's article, he will be starting a series of studies of the Book of Acts in the next issue. As there have been numerous and varied articles on Acts in Spiritual Blessings before, the question could well be asked, “Why another one?”

The answer is simple and twofold. Firstly, Acts is at a pivotal point in the development of God's purposes, and a correct understanding of the Book of Acts is critical to a correct understanding of what God did after the Lord's Crucifixion and Resurrection. If we go wrong in Acts, we will end up with a wrong interpretation of almost everything else in the New Testament.

Acts is like an intersection on a highway. Take the wrong turn and the correct destination will not be reached, no matter how sincere our intentions.

A major mistake that many make in studying the New Testament is to ignore the progress of time and the developments that take place as the witness proceeds. The development is important, and yet so many expositors ignore it and base much of their Gospel teaching for today on the Gospels. They overlook Rom.15:8 which says that the Lord was 'a servant to the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made to the fathers ...'

Secondly, a major mistake of many today is believing that the Church has replaced Israel in the purposes of God. This teaching is plainly not true and is responsible for much confusion.

Acts is the second chance for Israel to accept Jesus as their Messiah. It is not the start of the Church, the Body of Christ. Once this truth is recognized, a logical outcome is to separate the epistles of Paul written during Acts from those he wrote after Acts finished. The teaching in the two sets of epistles is different. Why do I speak only of Paul's epistles? Because Paul is the only “Apostle of the Gentiles”. The epistles of Peter, James and John etc. are for Jewish believers during Acts.

It is because so many earnest followers of the Lord Jesus have missed these truths that we come back to Acts time and time again. ❖

For Your diary ... BBFA 2011 ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Bethshan Conference Centre, Wyee, NSW.

24th-26th. Sept. 2011.

Registration Forms available in later issue.

BBFA Regular Meetings

You are invited to attend

Regular Bible study meetings are held in Brisbane, Sydney, Newcastle and Maitland. Meetings include hymn singing, prayer, and a Bible study, approx. 45-60 mins. in length, followed by refreshments. Questions and comments about the study are encouraged. These meetings are free of charge and everyone is welcome.

Brisbane:

Every Monday, 7pm.
231 Andrew Rd, Greenbank.
Group Co-ordinator: Frank Haegler (07) 3297 1981

Sydney:

4th. Sunday each month 3pm.
45/45 Philips St., Cabarita.
Group Co-ordinators: Peter & Anne Ward, (02) 9743 3452.

Newcastle:

Every Monday, 7:30pm. Baptist Retirement Home, Warabrook.
Phone Group Co-ordinators: David & Janelle Tavender, for details. (02) 4950 6708

Thornton:

Alternate Wednesdays, 10.am.
13 Drayton Ct. Thornton.
Group Co-ordinator: Susan Hall, (02) 4028 6260.

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