

Spiritual Blessings



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Doctrinal Basics

Wonderful Words of Life

by Athol Walter

Introduction

People are notoriously careless with words, which is surprising because it is almost impossible to communicate our thoughts to someone else without using them. While carelessness with words can have serious consequences in ordinary life, it is more serious to be careless in the study of God's Word, because, as a result, we can miss truth He has revealed and would have us understand. We can rest assured, however, that no matter how careless we may be with God's revelation to us, He has been careful and specific in His use of words, and we can trust those words completely. But it is up to us to make sure we understand what those words mean. I am sure that, in spite of what some Bible teachers say, God has said what He means, and more so, means what He says. And that belief underlies our approach to God's Word.

I know that as I came to a better understanding of the meaning of the words of the Bible, my appreciation of what God has done for me in Christ grew in leaps and bounds. I realised that I used words relating to my salvation not only carelessly, but in some cases without having the faintest idea what the words meant. I have worked to rectify that situation over many years, and I would like to pass on some of the things I have learned. I hope that some of

our other writers will also contribute to this series.

The terms I want to start with include such words as forgiveness, redemption, reconciliation, atonement, propitiation, sanctification, access and adoption. Other words will no doubt be added to the list, but these will do for a start. How would you go if you tried to write a concise definition of each of those words?

I once thought that those words all meant much the same thing, but I now know that is not true. Each word presents a different aspect of Christ's atoning work, and the clearer our understanding of the words, the deeper will be our understanding of God's great work for us.

It is necessary to have one term that indicates the complete work God has done for us in Christ, and I have chosen the word 'salvation' for this. You may think some other word is better, and I would be very happy to receive your thoughts about it, but for the present, I'll stick with 'salvation'.

Now To Our First Word

Let me ask you a question. What is the most important thing the Lord accomplished on the Cross? Please stop and think about your answer before reading on.

Answers I have received previously include: forgiveness of sins, freedom from guilt, access

to God's presence and peace with God. They are all good answers, but one thing Christ accomplished by His death is not only more important than those, it must precede them. The most important thing that the Lord's death accomplished was to make atonement. Without that, not one of the other benefits would have been possible.

Atonement

One thing must be cleared up at the outset. **We do not receive the atonement.** I know that the AV says in Romans 5:11 that we have received the atonement, but in spite of that, I repeat, we do not receive the atonement. We will come back to that shortly.

I hope that as you read the introduction to this study, you agreed with me that it is important to take care with the words God uses, so let's put our new resolve into practice. This means that first of all we will check the meaning of

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Editorial



Dear Reader,

It is hard to believe that it is time, once again, to write a short note to you. I think there must be a postscript to the Law of Relativity that says that the speed of time is directly proportional to one's age! Another truism is that things never remain the same; change is constant.

Some of the changes happening in my part of the world include the start of autumn, which is my favourite season. Many will know that the eastern states of Australia have been experiencing a severe drought for some years. It seems, however, that the El Nino effect, which causes the droughts, has finished for the time being, and as well as having cooler temperatures, we have had some good rains. The drought has not been broken as yet, but it looks hopeful, and we are grateful for the life-giving water.

We have also just finished, this weekend as I write, daylight saving, and our clocks are back to normal time. It always takes me quite a few days to adjust, either going into, or coming out of, daylight saving, so now we can settle down for 6 months or so until the next upheaval. But in all this change and uncertainty, as believers, we have the constancy of God's love and presence in our lives, the witness within that we are His children as Allan Humbley reminds us in his article, and the promises of His immutable Word that are our sheet anchor, holding us firmly and safely as the vagaries of life ebb and flow around us.

In this issue, David Tavender explains the meaning of miracles in the Bible – a very relevant topic in today's church scene and which

fits very well into the Dispensational Basics series. As mentioned above, Allan Humbley writes on the Lord's conversation with Nicodemus about 'being born again'; and I start a

new series explaining the meaning of the words used to describe what the Lord has done for us. If there are any Bible terms or words that you would like discussed, please write and let me know, and we'll do our best for you. We then have a thought-provoking article by Charles Welch, taken from the Berean Expositor.

Just over 12 months ago, Mike Penny of the Open Bible Trust in England, asked me to write a booklet for them. This has now been published and you can read about it on the back page. The title is 'That Wonderful Redemption' and I am pleased to say that the reception of it has been very positive. Subscribers to the 'Search' magazine will have already received a copy, but if you are not on the 'Search' list, I hope you will write in for it.

Finally, many thanks to all who phoned or wrote to my wife, Eveline, following the note about her health in the last issue. Your love, prayers and concern are greatly appreciated, and I'm happy to say that she is doing well. She has started a course of rehab. exercises, and walks for about 30 minutes each day. Medical reports show that her heart has repaired some of the damage it sustained, and while a complete recovery is unlikely, we are very grateful for her current state of well-being.

I hope, as usual, that you not only enjoy reading our efforts this issue, but that you will be helped, encouraged and brought closer to the Lord by these articles. All praise and glory to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Athol Walter.

Meetings

Come along and meet with us! All meetings (except annual conf.) are free. All welcome.

Brisbane:

Alternate Sundays 10:00am
Redbank Plains High School.

(07) 3802 1262

Sydney:

3rd Sunday of each month.

Lunch 12:30pm.

Study 1:30pm.

Various Venues

For details phone

(02) 4996 4455

Newcastle:

Every Monday.

7:30pm

34 Aroona St

Edgeworth.

(02) 4950 6708

Hilldale via Dungog:

7 pm Alternate Thursdays

11 Hilldale Rd

Hilldale

(02) 49956064

BBFA Annual Conference

2007

22nd - 24th September 2007
at Camp Toukley.

A Surprising Quote:-

"Distinguish as to times, and the Scriptures will harmonize."

St. Augustine.

Quoted by John Haley in his book, "Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible".



Wonderful Words of Life

'atonement' in our dictionaries. My dictionary says that it means: expiation, reparation for wrong or injury. It then says 'The Atonement, expiation of man's sins by Christ'.

We must now look up 'expiation', but before we do that, it will help our understanding to note that the dictionary also says that the verb 'to atone' means to make amends. We should expand that a little by saying that to atone means to make amends for a wrong or injury done. That is clear and easy to understand. Now 'expiate'. This word means to pay the penalty of, to make amends for, sin.

Another word that should be considered at this point, is propitiation. This is defined as 'the appeasement of an offended person'.

We can now come back to the question of who receives the atonement. If atonement means the act of making reparation or amends for a wrong or injury done, then to find the answer to our question, all we need to do is to ask who it is that has been offended or injured by our sin/s. It is immediately obvious that we are not the party that has been offended or injured. We are the offenders! Whose Law is it that has been broken by our sin? Not ours, but God's. So if it is God who has been offended or wronged by our sins, it is God who must receive atonement, and that is precisely what the Lord's death on Calvary did, **before it did anything else**. God's holiness had been offended by sin, and before He could make any move towards any sinner that wasn't one of judgement and condemnation, His justice and holiness had to be satisfied. In other words, atonement had to be made to Him, the wrong had to be put right in a just manner, and only then could He move to bring guilty sinners to Himself.

This raises an important question. If sin offended God's Holiness and demanded punishment that made atonement for the sin, and if atonement was not made until Christ died on Calvary, how could God deal with sinful humanity during the centuries before the Cross? The answer, I believe, lies in the fact that the Lord Jesus is called by two similar, yet different titles. Firstly, He is called the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8) and secondly, the Lamb fore-ordained before the foundation of the world (1 Peter 1:20). This means that before ever Adam sinned, God, in His foreknowledge, had provided the means of atonement. This is the reason why God could deal graciously and mercifully with Adam and the rest of us, and not compromise either His justice or holiness.

So how is it then, that the AV can say that we receive the atonement? It is all to do with the way language changes over time. In the English language of the 16th and 17th centuries, when the Authorized Version of the Bible was translated, the word atonement had **two** meanings. On the one hand, it meant what our dictionaries tell us it means – the making of amends for a wrong done. On the other hand, it meant to make at-one, i.e. to reconcile, two people or groups who had become alienated or estranged. Shakespeare used the word in this sense. And a writer named Philpot, about whom I know nothing, wrote this: 'What atonement is there between darkness and light?' Nowadays, we would put it like this: "What agreement is there between darkness and light?" or we might say, "How can you reconcile light and darkness?"

But in the intervening centuries, this meaning has dropped out of the language, and now to atone means only to make amends for a wrong

or sin. So what Paul really said in Romans 5:11 was that we have received the reconciliation, which is how modern versions translate the verse. I must repeat, however, that if Christ had not made atonement to God for the sins of the world, there would never have been any reconciliation for us.

But dictionary definitions are not the whole story. The next important step in understanding the words of God is to note how those words are used in Scripture. Some effort is required here and many of us drop off at this point, but we must not be lazy. It is worth the effort.

The first occurrence of the Hebrew word for atonement comes in a strange place. Genesis 6:14, "Make yourself an ark of gopher wood; ... and cover it inside and outside with pitch." The word translated 'cover' is 'qaphar', pronounced *kawfaw*. That almost sounds like our word cover, doesn't it? It is interesting and more than a little intriguing to note that the word for 'pitch' in this verse is 'qopher', which is allied to qaphar. Dr. Bullinger's marginal note in the Companion Bible, by the way, says that this word means resin rather than pitch.

The next occurrence of 'qaphar' comes some centuries later, when Jacob is returning to meet his brother Esau. He says in Genesis 32:20, "... I will appease him with the present that goes before me, and afterward I will see his face." It is the word 'appease' here that translates 'qaphar'. What Jacob literally said was, "I will cover his face with my presents ..." I think the thought in Jacob's mind is this, "I will appease my brother's anger (shown in his face) with my presents. Perhaps he will then accept me."

Perhaps a little summary is needed here. The only Hebrew word for

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atonement in the Old Testament simply means a covering, but in the developing usage of the language, it came to mean atonement, an act of reparation that 'covered' the sin by making amends for it. We need to take care with this idea of atonement covering sin. There is certainly no thought that God has simply 'covered up' our sins. We use the word cover in a variety of ways, such as: take out insurance cover; the reporter covered the fire for his paper; the express train covers the distance in half the time, and a favourite when I was a boy, "Don't move, I've got you covered".

With these thoughts in mind, I repeat, God has not simply covered up our sins. He has made full atonement for it in the death of His Son, the offence has been expiated, sin has been fully covered in that complete satisfaction has been given, and therefore, "there is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus". (Rom. 8:1)

The Old Testament picture of the Lord's atonement is found in Leviticus 16, in the program of the Day of Atonement. This was the most solemn day in the Jewish year. After elaborate cleansing rituals, the high priest went into the tabernacle and the Holy of Holies with incense and the blood of sacrificial animals, cleansed the whole structure, its furniture and its implements, and then sprinkled some of the blood on the Mercy Seat. This was all done to make atonement for Israel's sins of the previous year, and gave them a clean slate to start again with God. On God's side, it enabled Him to put up with them, as it were, for another year. A point to notice in the account is that there could be no carelessness in any of the preparations of the high priest, for

if everything was not done just right, he would die when he stood before God in the Holiest Place. So it was that once the high priest had entered in, the people waited outside in hushed silence for him to reappear. When he did so, it was the sign that the sacrifice had been acceptable to God, and their sins had been 'covered by the blood'. Hebrews 7, 8 and 9 has a lot to say about these things.

The reality of this typical pre-figuring is found on the day of the Lord's resurrection. In John 20: 10-18 we read of the Lord appearing to Mary in the garden early on the resurrection morning. She wanted to hold His feet in love and homage, but He said to her, "Don't touch me (or don't cling to Me) for I have not yet ascended to My Father ..." (v. 17).

Now to Luke 24:36-39. Here, later on that same day, the Lord appeared to the disciples in the upper room. They, quite understandably, thought they were seeing a ghost, but the Lord said to them, "Why are you troubled? Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see ..." Do I have to say that to handle someone we have to touch them?

Now let me spell it out. Early in the morning, the Lord would not let Mary touch Him. Like the high priest of old, (of course, the Lord was the real – the true – High Priest) He could not be contaminated before His entry in the Heavenly Holy of Holies. Later in the day, He allowed others to touch Him, indeed, He invited them to do so. He said to Mary that she could not touch Him for He had not yet ascended to His Father. So, if later, others could touch Him, it must mean that, in the meantime, He had indeed ascended to the Heavenly Tabernacle and cleansed it with His blood. In this way, atonement for the sins of the world

was fully and completely made. And, just like the high priest in tabernacle and temple, the Lord then reappeared and showed Himself alive to His people. This was the crowning signal that His death had been completely acceptable to God.

Out of many other things that could be said on this subject, let me bring one little jewel as I conclude. Leviticus teaches us about the various offerings the Israelites were to bring to the Lord as part of the Tabernacle worship. In chs. 5 and 6 we read of the trespass offering. A person could trespass either against God or their neighbour, and in both cases restitution had to be made. The guilty one had to restore what had been damaged or restitution had to be made for the wrong done. The Hebrew word for 'restitution' here is 'shalam'. It is a variant of the word 'shalom', which means peace, of course. If we trespass against someone, there can be no peace until restitution is made. When that is done, then peace is restored.

The same holds true with God. We cannot have peace with God until full restitution is made. The problem is, we can only make that restitution by our deaths. But One, our Kinsman, has stepped in, taken our place and paid the price. The sin has been atoned for. Satisfaction has been given. Our High Priest went into the true Holy of Holies in Heaven and sprinkled His own blood on the Mercy Seat, and God's justice and holiness were fully satisfied. And on the basis of that atonement, the glorious message goes out to the world, "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself.Now you come and be reconciled to God."

Surely, atonement is a wonderful word of life. ◻

The Purpose Of Miracles

By David Tavender

The issue of miracles in the Christian community today is a rather controversial one. There is a lot of inconsistency in how the church deals with this controversial subject, yet one aspect which is frequently overlooked is that the miraculous occurrences in the Bible actually had meaning.

They were signs - they signified something. Regarding instances where people were miraculously healed, for example, it wasn't simply that the healers had compassion. Christ was certainly compassionate (Matthew 14:14) and other miracle workers in the Scriptures may well have been too, but it should not be ignored that there are specific reasons for these phenomena occurring in the Bible, apart from just being acts of kindness. Such miracles as the healings, speaking in tongues, snake-handlings, demon-exorcisms (Mark 16:18), etc are often called "evidential miracles", because they are indisputably signs of God's power and authority by which the miracles were performed.

Miracles in Egypt

The miracles performed by the Lord in Mose's time had real purposes, and they were largely to do with displaying the might of the one true God, and showing that He was able to carry out what He had promised. Consider these verses:

"I will stretch out my hand and strike the Egyptians with all the wonders that I will perform among them. After that, Pharaoh will let you go." (Exodus 3:20)

"Aaron spake all the words which the Lord had spoken unto Moses, and did the signs in the sight of the people [i.e. Israel]: and the people believed". (Exodus 4:30,31)

"I will ... multiply my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt ... and the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I stretch forth Mine hand upon Egypt, and bring out the children of Israel from among them". (Exodus 7:3,5)

These wonders were not a pointless show of strength. Rather they demonstrated that Jehovah was who He said He was, and that He had the ability to bless the nation of Israel in ways they could not have imagined otherwise. Each of the plagues, for instance, was a direct assault upon the gods of Egypt. The river turning to blood attacked the people's belief in the Nile River as a god (Exodus 7:14-25). The darkness which came upon Egypt showed the impotency of the Egyptians' sun god Ra (Exodus 10:21-23), and so on. Sadly, people did not always respond to the Lord by believing in Him or embracing Him.

Miracles of Christ

Have you ever considered why the Lord Jesus Christ, crucified at the age of 33, performed no miracles until He was 30 years old. Think about that. For ninety percent of His earthly life, He performed not one miraculous work. Up to that point, He had led a sinless life, but no one during those early years ever saw Him as being a miracle worker. When He did finally begin to perform extraordinary deeds, the people of Nazareth, whom He had grown up amongst, couldn't believe it - "Is this not the carpenter?", they asked (Mark 6:3). It wasn't until His public ministry began that He started to perform miraculous deeds, such as instant healings, feeding 5000, turning water into wine, etc, this is what really caused Him to stand out.



Why wait until the final stages of His life? Were there not sick people around Him before He turned 30? Of

course there were. So, was He not willing or able to heal them? And why did He not perform any other type of miracle before then?

The Lord displayed His wondrous deeds when He did, and not a moment beforehand, because the miracles were signs to show the people of Israel that this Jesus of Nazareth was a man approved by God. When it was time to show Himself to the people of Israel, and for them to make a decision about this Jesus and the way God was dealing with the people through Him, then the miracles began. All of a sudden, miraculous deeds started coming thick and fast, where there were none before.

John 20:30,31 says that, "many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples ... but these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through His name". But, why would miracles especially prove that this man was the Son of God? The answer lies in Isaiah 35.

Miracles Predicted

In the Old Testament, the Jewish nation was promised that, at a future time, "your God ... will come ... Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing".

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(Isaiah 35:4-6). And isn't that exactly what happened when their God did come to them in the form of the Lord Jesus Christ? The blind received sight (Matthew 9:27-30); the deaf were given hearing (Mark 7:32-35); the lame walked (Matthew 21:14); the mutes were given speech (Mark 9:17-27) - exactly as promised in Isaiah 35, and more besides. It was all primarily to show the people that this Jesus of Nazareth was God in the flesh.

They were required to believe Him, and change their ways, but as we know, many did neither. As a general rule, miracles in the Bible were "signs" to those who didn't believe in either the one true God, the people He sent on His behalf, or His limitless and powerful nature. Many times the signs were directed to an unbelieving Israel. Peter sheds further light on this subject in his speech on the day of Pentecost. He spoke to the "Men of Israel" about "Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by Him in the midst of you .. [but] ye have taken and ... crucified Him". (Acts 2:22,23). The miracles were to show Israel that He was the Son of God, but instead of believing Him, their response was, "Crucify Him".

Moreover, after Peter and John had healed a lame man, some of the religious leaders had them arrested because this miracle was accompanied by teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 4:2,3). Even the enemies of Christ had to admit among themselves that, "indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them ... and we cannot deny it". At this point they could have said to themselves that God had truly wrought a miracle,

and that what they were saying about Jesus of Nazareth must have been true. Instead they refused to believe, and commanded Peter and John "not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus" (Acts 4:15-18).

For then ... but not now

Let's consider another example found in Acts 19:11,12. The Lord did some extraordinary miracles through Paul. Handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured. This was during the time of the Acts period, when Israel were still being dealt with by God as His chosen nation. However, after Acts, when Israel was set aside, Paul was no longer able to heal.

We read in the writings after Acts that Paul left one of his friends, Trophimus, sick in Miletus. (2 Timothy 4:20). He gives advice to Timothy to take a little wine for his stomach illnesses and "thine often infirmities" (1 Timothy 5:23). Paul no longer seems to have been able to do much about this in any miraculous way, nor about his friend Epaphroditus when he was sick either (Philippians 2:26,27). A change had taken place.

The setting aside of Israel at Acts 28 is a major reason why there are no miracles recorded in the letters written after Acts 28 - Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus and Philemon. Since Israel is no longer the dominant nation, the method which God used to demonstrate His will to the Israelites no longer is appropriate. The promises in Isaiah 35 of miraculous cures for the blind, deaf, mute and lame were to Israelites. Currently, there is no Jew or Gentile in God's dealings with mankind, and these phenomena have been put on hold

until He begins to deal with that nation in a special way again, for His special purposes.

As further evidence of this change, it is no coincidence either that the words sign/s, miracle/s or wonder/s do not appear in those writings after Acts. Rather, we read of God's power working with our inner being, strengthening us, but never in the sense of enabling us to perform wondrous miracles. I encourage you to look these words up in a concordance (or search them in a Bible computer program) and see that this is plainly the case. The miraculous phenomena are just not part of Christianity after Israel was set aside at the end of Acts.

Miracle or no miracle?

As for today, God certainly may be involved in many works of healing and other supernatural phenomena, but rarely, if ever, does He seem to carry out the "evidential" kind. This goes beyond curing a twinge in the knee that goes away after a day or so, or a condition such as post-natal depression, etc. I'm referring to the spectacular, that which can be demonstrated to be physically impossible. In other words, that which can be absolutely shown to be an instant working of God.

Sadly, much of what is passed off as "a miracle of God" today is quite often found to be much less than that upon any real investigation. It is one thing for a person to say they have been healed of a disease - it is quite a different matter to have medical verification of this situation before and after the miracle is supposed to have taken place. It would be a brave (or foolish!) person who would say that God can't ever or doesn't ever perform some wondrous acts that defy normal human explanation.

The Purpose Of Miracles

No one should ever place limits on the limitless God. However, the pattern from the Scriptures is that evidential miracles were largely signs to unbelieving Israel, and that when Israel were set aside at Acts 28, so were the miracles. That is the normal course of events we have before us today.

Wrong Division

There have been many remarkable claims made by the leaders of various Christian movements. Some "miracles" are performed by charlatans who are really better described as illusionists, and there have been many proven cases of fraud. Putting those types of people aside for a moment, it must be said that many attempts at working miracles are made by people who genuinely believe that this is the way that God deals with His church today. However sincere the intent, the result is often an inconsistent mish-mash of meaningless occurrences paraded forth as works of the Spirit (people's dental fillings turning into gold overnight comes to mind as just one example). You won't see many of the so-called "faith healers" of today raising people back from the dead, as Paul did in Acts 20. Sometimes such miracles are claimed today, but I haven't read of one instance yet that wasn't shown to be something else upon further investigation.

Perhaps the saddest side of all this is that there are many cases of people being hurt as a result of misguided promises about miracles, and about healing in particular. This should be an issue of great concern, not only to Christians, but to the wider community as well. Many genuine seekers have been made promises of healing which could not be kept. Accusations of a "lack of faith" often accompany this

failure, and too many people have been shattered beyond remedy. We see an example of this in 2 Timothy 2:15-18, where Hymenaeus and Philetus "erred, saying that the resurrection is past already". They didn't deny the fact of resurrection, but they were terribly wrong about its timing. What was the result? That errant teaching "overthrew the faith of some", and isn't that what takes place today? People are promised something that belonged to another time, but that simply isn't the way things work in the present day. It is no small coincidence that this example is brought up only two verses after Paul's exhortation to "rightly divide" Scripture. We are mistaken if we are under the impression that accurate study of the Bible is just for the sake of head knowledge. Wrong division can, and frequently does, ruin a person's faith and often their very lives.

Let's not forget, either, that there were some other "miracles" which took place in the early church. Ananias and Sapphira were struck down dead on the spot (Acts 5:1-11), and Philip was miraculously transported from one place to another (Acts 8:39,40). These are both cases of divine intervention, but how often do we hear claims of such occurrences today? Surely, if such instances were happening now, they would be very easy to prove! Yet when people set out to prove if these are miracles or not, the sort of proof required which would stand up in a court of law is, time after time, often missing, or not documented adequately, or not available, etc, etc. Remember Acts 4:16-18? Even the enemies of the Lord could not dispute that a miracle had indeed been performed.

Summary

In closing it must be reiterated that what is often claimed to be a divine

working today is not always so. We refuse to state what God can and can't do, but this is not the way in which God generally deals with His people today. If He did, then our hospitals would be empty and medical staff would not be necessary. But because miracles in the Acts period were to be a sign to Israel, and since Israel are no longer being dealt with as a special nation in this dispensation, we do not see these kinds of workings today as a rule. I have to say that recognising that the miracles in the Bible had meanings has given both me and many others a plausible answer to the problems which vexed us for a long time about this whole issue. More importantly, though, one can continue to have confidence in the integrity of God and His Word if seeking truth about these matters.

□

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Set aside these dates
in your diary now and plan
to be with us this year!

Sept 22nd -24th
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Venue: Camp
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You Must Be Born Again by Allan Humbley

Read John 3:1-21

The above reading has to be one of the best-known of all gospel passages, yet it is one to which I find myself returning over and over again. It is a story that we learned in Sunday School and we are at risk of seeing it as just another simple but basic truth and leaving it at that – without ever really understanding what our Lord was speaking about.

I know of a young man who grew up in a very well connected church family. This young man passed right through the junior programme at his church and went on to become a very active member. However, when life threw up a few of those difficulties that we all encounter, and as he fell under the charm of what this world has to offer, he walked away from church life altogether.

There is a very sad footnote to this story. An older church member was concerned enough to challenge this young chap on the issues of faith and eternal values. The young man's frank reply was along these lines: 'I really don't have a clue about any of that. I have never had the foggiest idea of what it is all about'.

I believe that, in a very real sense, that young man is everywhere – even here in this congregation. He has countless names and faces, and sometimes he is no longer young. Of course, I am using him as representative of a huge number of people, and in that sense you will see that it could just as easily be a woman as a man.

And so it is that I would like to direct your attention to a man who came to the Lord Jesus with questions on his mind, and went away with

answers ringing in his ears – answers that were simplicity exemplified, but at the same time, so profound that they have often been missed altogether. That man's name was Nicodemus.

The story of Nicodemus, recorded in chapter three of John's gospel, is extremely interesting. We could focus on his high position as a member of the Jewish ruling council; we could conjecture almost endlessly as to why the setting for his meeting with Christ was 'by night'; but let's get to the point, which is something we don't always want to do because that can mean that we lose control of the issue.

Nicodemus initiated the recorded conversation with some words that are most revealing. He said, 'We know that you are a teacher sent from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him.' 'We know', he said. Who are 'we'? It must have been Nicodemus and the group that he belonged to, i.e. the Jewish Ruling Council – the same group who worked so ruthlessly against our Lord – who knew that He was a teacher sent from God and that He was operating in the power of God.

The first recorded statement by Christ to Nicodemus was this (V3): '*I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.*'

Let me say here that while this expression 'born again' has passed into our common usage, and is even bandied around in the sense that some think that a 'born again Christian' is in some way superior to ordinary Christians, it may be helpful to understand that a better translation than 'born again' is 'born (or generated) from above'. To be born again is to be born or generated from above.

It is recorded that Nicodemus found this concept rather puzzling. I have heard it suggested that he was just playing dumb. I understand, too, that when a gentile became a proselyte (which really entails a full conversion to the Jewish faith – a religious naturalisation ceremony if you like), the Jews described that process as a new birth, a new beginning. But I think that Nicodemus was genuinely struggling with the concept that had been presented to him.

So the Lord goes a step further – expanding on what He had just said - by saying: '*I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, "You must be born again".*'

The pure simplicity and logic in that statement is often overlooked as people get involved in side issues. The bottom line is that our Lord is speaking of two births. Flesh gives birth to flesh – He is speaking of natural things – like begets like. Plant a cucumber seed and what do you get? Cucumbers! Human reproduction results in human life. Flesh gives birth to flesh. But, He says, the analogy holds good when we move beyond the natural. The Spirit gives birth to spirit. Can't you see what I am telling you, Nicodemus? You shouldn't be surprised when I tell you, "You must be born again!"

"Nicodemus, if you want to have any part in the kingdom of God, you must be born again". That is a very clear positional statement from the lips of our Lord – and it is still truth for today. I look around me in this congregation and I see people who have been born of the flesh. That includes every one of us. You are

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all sitting there in bodies of flesh and you all have at least a basic understanding of how flesh gives birth to flesh.

And, you know, there really are some things that are comforting about being here in the flesh. We know that we are still alive, and that we are in this place together with friends and family; and to varying extents, we have plans and hopes and ambitions for the future. That is our natural human state – the way that we are – as we sit here in our natural bodies of flesh. Oh yes, it is very easy to get quite comfortable and become complacent.

But then, if we turn back to the Word of God, it immediately rains on our parade and blows all of our complacency out of the window. In 1 Corinthians 15:50 we find these words: *'I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood does not inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.'*

Doesn't that sound very much like the words of our Lord to Nicodemus, "I tell you the truth; no one can see the kingdom of God **unless** he is born again."?

Don't think that this is an isolated text, doctrine or teaching. In John 6, we read of Christ giving some teaching to Jews in the synagogue in Capernaum – teaching that wasn't readily accepted even by His disciples, to the extent that many of them turned back and no longer followed Him. But let me extract just one statement of our Lord from toward the end of that teaching session (V63): *'The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing.'*

We could quote Scripture after Scripture in support of this basic truth, but we still arrive at the same point. If you want the assurance of an eternal future with God, and if

you are looking for a daily experience of the presence of God in this life – **the flesh counts for nothing**. Flesh and blood do not inherit the kingdom of God. No one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.

Now doesn't that make this business of being 'born again' suddenly seem very important? In fact, the need to be 'born again' or 'born from above' (something much higher than our natural birth) should become a consuming passion or quest. How do I put this in the simplest of terms?

The Lord Jesus said to Nicodemus, "Flesh gives birth to flesh." Each one of us is the product of an act of procreation by our parents. They are/were flesh and so, too, are we. And that process of flesh giving birth to flesh can be traced all the way back to our first parents. And that process is also immutable, we can't change it. We may give our children our love, education, possessions, everything that we have – but they are still flesh – and in the context of spiritual realities, the flesh counts for nothing.

But the Bible speaks of the glorious possibility of us becoming children of God – now there's a word of hope – children born not of natural descent (as in flesh gives birth to flesh), nor of human decision or a husband's will, **but born of God**. (John 1:12,13) This is a new reality. It is being born from above.

There is the old song that says: "All God's children To be God's children you've got to be born again". I think it may be one of those Negro Spirituals, but in any case, it is right on the money. Don't confuse the fact that all mankind is God's creation with the false doctrine of the universal fatherhood of God. The reality is

this: to be God's children, you've got to be born again.

In John 1:12 it says: *'Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God.'* Plain logic tells us all that you cannot become something that you already are. So in becoming children of God, you must obviously become something that you never were before.

And how does this miracle come about? What causes it to happen? The answer is there in that very verse. Belief in His name – that is the essential - and the miracle won't happen without it! "To those who believed in his name, He gave the right to become children of God." I'd love to speak for hours about this – but I won't! I'm very close to finishing.

So, what is meant by belief in His name? In the simplest of terms, belief in the name of Jesus Christ means and includes belief in all that that most marvellous name stands for. It means belief in all that He claimed to be. It means belief in all that the Scriptures teach about Him – about who He was, what He did during His earthly life, His atoning sacrifice on Calvary, and His resurrection which was the evidence that His offering of Himself was acceptable to God, and without which our entire faith is worthless. Do you need a full understanding of all of these things to be saved? No! Not at all. But it all begins with belief in the name and being of Christ as the Son of God and in the efficacy of His sacrificial death for your sins.

There are some very helpful words in Romans 10, from v. 9 on: *'If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord" (that is, state your belief so that others may hear and know*

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it), and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.'

Only a few moments ago, we saw that it is belief in the name of Jesus that brings the right to become children of God, and now in Romans we see that it is belief in Christ that saves. To be saved is to become a child of God – it's all wrapped up together.

John 3:16 is so familiar. But it speaks right to the heart of what I have been saying today. Firstly, God loved the world so much that He gave His only begotten Son. Well, that's very nice, but left at that point it does me no good. There has to be more, and there is. God gave His only begotten Son that **whosoever believes on Him** should not perish but have eternal life.

You may be thinking to yourself, "That sounds very convincing, but how can I ever know if it's real?" In concluding, let me answer with a verse of Scripture and then a word from my own experience which is relevant to that Scripture.

In 1 John 5:10 we read: *'He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself.'* In other words, you will know. It's not a matter of bells and whistles, bright lights, or any sudden change in your circumstances in life, such as a great upsurge in your health, wealth or prosperity. I have a friend who came to church as a young teenager with little idea of Christian teaching, but one who knew he had a deep need. I have heard him say on a number of occasions that when he was saved — something happened. He had no idea at that time what the difference was, but he knew something had definitely changed. He now knows that he

had been born again and had become a child of God.

My parents were ministers in the Salvation Army and even now I wonder at their dedication to what they saw as their vocation, but that's another matter. When I had just turned 6, they were given a 4 year appointment to the Paddington Corps in Brisbane. I have no way of remembering exactly which year it was, but at about the age of 8, in the Sunday school room underneath the Hall when an appeal was made in the Sunday School meeting, I acknowledged my desperate need of the Saviour and accepted God's gift of life in Christ Jesus.

What changed? Did I suddenly become an angel always putting others first and witnessing fearlessly for my Lord? I'd be a liar if I said that was so and you wouldn't believe me anyway. But you know, something did happen, and with the benefit of hindsight I have seen it for many years now although it took quite some time to dawn on me. It was the witness within. I realise how that can sound pretentious and pious, but it's not meant like that. However, it's true.

And while the witness within continually brings comfort and strength, it has been in the times of temptation, the testing times, the times of weakness – that I have become most acutely aware of the witness within. Sometimes it has been almost like a tap on the shoulder or a voice in my ear – nothing physical, of course – but something that has come to me saying, "Don't go there! You know that's not right! That's not worthy of a child of God! To do or to say that can only bring dishonour to the name of your Saviour."

Have I always been obedient to that inner voice? No. Many times I have exercised the free will that God has allowed me, and gone against the inner voice – as have you all – and one day I will stand before my Lord to give an account for the deeds done in the body. It is a sobering thought – and this should be all the motivation that any Christian needs to walk worthily with and for his Lord.

But I give thanks to God for His gift of love in Christ Jesus, the gift of eternal life, the right to become His child, and that He has not left me wondering whether I've got it or not, but has given the witness within.

John Greenleaf Whittier has expressed in poetic words what I have just been trying to explain – and he's done it very well in these words: *In joy of inward peace, or sense of sorrow over sin, He is His own best evidence, His witness is within.*

Is there someone here who has never known the experience of being 'born again'? As we have seen, this is entirely basic to becoming a child of God, to being 'saved' as we term it, of obtaining eternal life, and of having the assurance of the witness within.

Put your faith in nothing else. Put your faith in nothing less.

"If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord' and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved".

If you have never really done that, will you do it now?



Waiting on the Lord.

From the Berean Expositor, Vol. 31, by Charles Welch.

“Blessed”, “good” and “unashamed”.

“Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord.” (Psalm 27:14)

One of the characteristics of fallen human nature is its impatience, its over-haste, its inability to wait. Perhaps the loss of immortality, and the consciousness of the enormous amount of work that lies ahead may account for this trait. Moreover, impatience is not a fault that is limited to the ungodly; it is also a common failing among the redeemed.

Scripture often calls upon the believer to ‘wait’, and there are nineteen different words thus translated in the Old and New Testaments. We will touch on some of them in this study, and trust that they may be blessed of God and used by Him to provide help and encouragement.

‘Blessing’ is promised in Isaiah 30:18 to him that waits for the Lord, while in Isaiah 40:31 we read that “they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength”. We also read in Isaiah 49:23: “They shall not be ashamed that wait for Me”, and in Lamentations 3:25: “The Lord is good unto them that wait for Him, to the soul that seeketh Him”.

Then there are the wonderful words of Lamentations 3:26: *“It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord.”*

The waiting upon God that is silent, restful and uncomplaining.

We now draw the reader’s attention to Psalm 62:1: “Truly my soul waiteth upon God”.

Dummiyah, the word translated ‘wait’ here, conveys the idea of *silence*. In the fifth verse of this same Psalm we read:

“My soul, wait thou only upon Him.”

Here again the word ‘wait’, *damam*, is literally, ‘to be silent’. The Psalmist uses this same word in other places, but it is often rendered differently in the Authorized Version. For example, in the well-known words of Psalm 37:7, “Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him”, the word ‘rest’ is again *damam*, ‘be silent’ as in Psalm 62. The word is also used in Lamentations 3:26, where it is translated “quietly wait”.

In Job 4:16 we read: *“There was silence and I heard a voice”*.

Perhaps we hear so little and receive such scant answers to our prayers because, in the Lord’s presence, we are not sufficiently silent.

This ‘silence’ or ‘quiet waiting’ may imply something more, however, for in Lamentations 3:27-33, immediately following the verse quoted above, we read:

“It is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth. He sitteth alone and keepeth silence (*damam*) because he hath borne it upon him. He keepeth his mouth in the dust; if so here may be hope. He giveth his cheek to him that smiteth him; he is filled full of reproach. For the Lord will not cast off forever; but though He cause grief, yet will He have compassion according to the multitude of His mercies. For He does not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men.”

Here the man of God is silent. He is full of ‘reproach’ certainly, but his mouth is not full of reproaches as he enters into the Divine Presence.

We have the other side of the subject in Psalm 83:1, where we read: “Keep not thou silence, O God, hold not Thy peace, and be not still.”

Let us, then, be more silent, so that He may speak. Let us be silent in patient expectation. Let us be silent in our resting in the Lord, so that we may be able to say: “Truly my soul silently waits for God; from Him comes my salvation”. (Psalm 62:1, New KJV) □

Perhaps an apt postscript to the above article is found in these words written by General Albert Orsborn of The Salvation Army:-

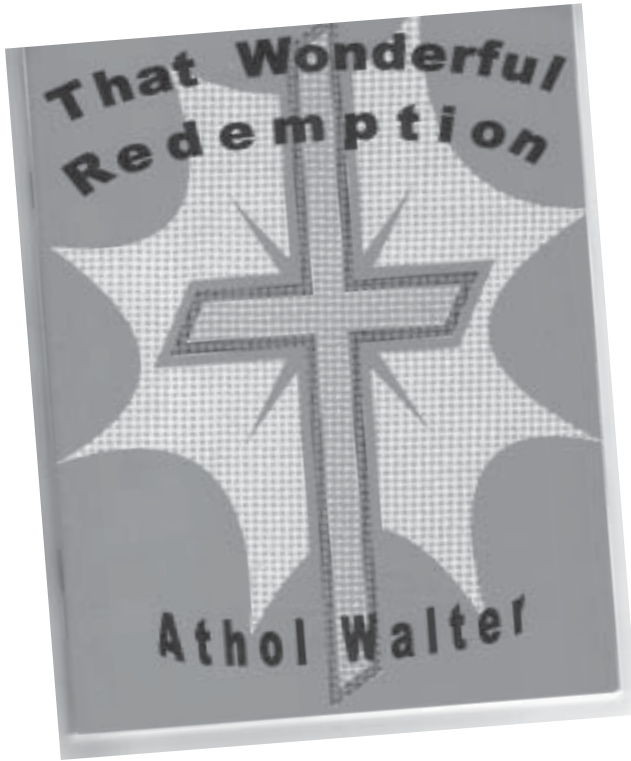
“In the secret of Thy presence,
Where the pure in heart may dwell,
Are the springs of sacred service
And a power that none can tell.
There my love must bring its offering,
There my heart must yield its praise,
And the Lord will come, revealing,
All the secrets of His ways.

More than all my lips may utter,
More than all I do or bring,
Is the depth of my devotion
To my Saviour, Lord and King.
Nothing less will keep me tender;
Nothing less will keep me true;
Nothing less will keep the fragrance
And the bloom on all I do.

*In the secret of Thy presence,
In the hiding of Thy power,
Let me love Thee, let me serve
Thee,
Every consecrated hour.*

That Wonderful Redemption

A booklet by Athol Walter,
published by the Open Bible Trust.



Review by John Hutton:-

Most books deal with the results and benefits that are ours as believers as a result of Christ's obedience to God which ended with His death on the Cross, and rightly so, as those things are very important to understand.

Very few, however, look at the bigger picture and try to discover why God took the steps that He did. It seems that it was of paramount importance to God to prove that He was not only just, but was seen to be just, in condemning sin and justifying the believer.

In "That Wonderful Redemption", Athol has attempted to see the events of Scripture from God's side and it is like no other book that I have read in that regard. When we begin to see the bigger picture, then those things that pertain to us are much easier to understand.

I would recommend that the readers of Spiritual Blessings not only obtain a copy of Athol's book, but that they distribute it to as many of their Christian friends as they possibly can. One comment that I heard was that they had never considered some of the things in the book and that "it was brilliant".

Other readers' comments about "That Wonderful Redemption":

Several have said: "I couldn't put it down."

"I read it through twice".

"The way you have connected everything together is wonderful."

Copies of this booklet are obtainable from David Tavender, BBFA, PO Box 3141, Glendale, NSW, 2285, Australia. Price: \$5 incl. postage in Australia.

Overseas readers can write to:

The Open Bible Trust, Fordland Mount, Upper Basildon, Reading, RG8 8LU, Great Britain or Bible Search Publications Inc., 1025 Post Road, Brookfield, WI 53005, USA.

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