

Spiritual Blessings



Vol. 21 No.3
May/June 2007

The official journal of the Berean Bible Fellowship of Australia

Doctrinal Basics

Wonderful Words of Life *Part 2* by Athol Walter

In the first article of this series dealing with the Scriptural words of Christ's work of Salvation, we considered the word 'atonement'. The atonement provided by the Lord Jesus Christ by His death at Calvary is absolutely fundamental to the plan of Salvation. The atonement was not made to us, but to God who is the offended party in the matter of sin, and unless God's Holiness receives full and complete satisfaction when sin is dealt with, then it would be impossible for Him to make any move towards guilty sinners without compromising His character. It was only when the atonement was made by the Son, that God, in love, could then justly proclaim forgiveness and all the other benefits that come to the believer from the death of Christ. We certainly receive Salvation because of the atonement, but we do not receive the atonement itself. Now we come to our word for this study, which is:

Reconciliation

Reconciliation is the bringing together in harmony of two parties who have been alienated or estranged for some reason or other. The foundational passage on reconciliation is 2 Corinthians 5, particularly from verse 14 onwards. Paul states that if (this is the "if" of argument, not the "if" of condition) Christ died for all, then it follows that all have died. It also follows that because Christ rose and now lives, those who are in

Him, also live in and for Him, and not in and for themselves. Therefore we do not live after the flesh, but after the Spirit, for we are new creations in Christ. Now I'll quote from v. 18 on:

"Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now, then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. He (God) made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." (NKJV)

I urge you to go over these verses again and again and ponder them deeply, for they are truth that is indeed 'Good News' for us.

Notice that it is God who made the first move in bringing about reconciliation. Not only was God cut off from us by sin but obviously, we were cut off from Him. The saddest and silliest part of it all is that the natural man regards God as his enemy. Paul touches on this in Romans 5.

Verse 6: "For when we were still without strength, in due time,

Christ died for the ungodly." Verse 8: "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Verse 10: "For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life."

Note the implication in that last verse. Reconciliation is but a step towards being saved. But my main point is this. When Christ died, all humanity were ungodly sinners and enemies of God. Now turn back to 2 Corinthians 5 again. To repeat the point, God had to make the first move because we were totally incapable of doing anything to save ourselves.

The next point to notice is that it was the world that God reconciled to Himself in Christ. I emphasise this because there are some who teach that Christ died only for the

continued Pg.3.....

Inside

<i>Editorial</i>	2
<i>The Bible Tells Me So</i>	5
<i>Stephen</i>	6
<i>All</i>	8
<i>The Wonder of God's Love</i>	9
<i>The Riches of God</i>	11

Editorial

A pleasant, and initially unexpected, result of sending out this magazine is the letters and emails received from like-minded believers in many parts of the world. Our regular readers will know that in the past couple of years we have had letters and contributions from believers in Russia, Norway, Great Britain, the Philippines, the United States and Canada. There are also messages, both verbal and written, from folk here in Australia. It is gratifying to have your feedback and support, and if you have sometimes thought you would like to write to us but just haven't got around to it, let me encourage you to pick up your pen, or turn the computer on, and get in touch. Naturally, we like to know that our work is appreciated and found to be helpful, but your questions and constructive criticism are also welcome. We firmly believe that the Bible itself is up to any challenge, and on the more personal level, if our understanding and interpretation of God's Word can be shown from Scripture to be faulty, then we



should, and will, change, for the Word is not only the ultimate authority – it is the only authority for believers.

I have had a number of letters since the publication of the book "That Wonderful Salvation" by the Open Bible Trust of Great Britain in February of this year. It is thrilling, and humbling, to know that a number of people are using the book as a study guide in various meetings. If the content of the book does nothing more than send readers back to their Bibles, then that in itself is a worthwhile result.

One person has written to me after reading the book, but did not include a name or address. If the writer wishes me to reply, then please let me know who and where you are. I also want to acknowledge receipt of the second letter from RB of England. It arrived safely.

There is a good variety of articles and writers in this issue of Spiritual Blessings. The theme of God's love has come through quite strongly, and I have to admit that I did not plan it this way. It is interesting to note

that not only are different writers simultaneously expressing very similar thoughts, but articles chosen out of older writings also have similar thoughts. I like to think that the Lord has had a hand in it all.

So we send out this issue of Spiritual Blessings, praying that the Lord will use the thoughts expressed in it to bless, guide, instruct and make us all more conformable to His image. To Him be all the glory and praise.
Athol Walter.

Never Satisfied!

The story is told of a farmer back in the horse and buggy days, who was particularly noted for his grumbling. If someone complimented him on a fine crop of wheat, he would reply with a groan that the potatoes had failed.

The next year, the potato crop was fine but he groaned that it was a poor wheat harvest. It seemed that no single year could ever be a complete success.

But then, one year, the unthinkable happened – every crop he planted was an outstanding success. Surely there could be no complaints this time. "Bumper

crops all round", a friend said. "Aye", came the farmer's stubborn reply, "and it nearly killed the horses bringing it all in!" There was just no pleasing that man. But we're not like that, are we! Well, we should not be, for what does Paul say?

"Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world ... Now Godliness with contentment is great gain ... Rejoice in the Lord always. Be anxious for nothing. (Selected verses from Philippians and 1 Timothy.)

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.

elect. That is unscriptural. One of the best known verses in the Bible, John 3:16, says plainly that God gave His only-begotten Son for the world, i.e. for all Adam's race, because He loved the whole sorry lot of us. The verses here in 2 Cor. 5 state the same truth, "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself". It certainly is true that many of Adam's race, by choice, have not been reconciled to God, but that is a very different thing to saying that Christ's sacrifice was not for the whole world, but only for the elect.

I hope you can see how reconciliation logically flows out of the atonement. It seems to me that the atonement is assumed by Paul as he writes these words. After telling us that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, he then says that he and his co-workers have been given the job of pleading with all and sundry to come and be reconciled to God. Verse 21 tells us how it is possible that God can send them out with this message. God made His righteous Son to be sin for us, so that we in turn, whose righteousness was like filthy rags, might become the righteousness of God in Him. When He became sin for all of us and paid the penalty for that sin, that atoning act made it possible for God to reckon Christ's righteousness to those who believe in Him.

What glorious, good news this is – all our sins paid for, the power of sin broken, the very righteousness of Christ gifted to us, if we will but stretch out our hand and place it in faith on the head of Jesus, our Passover Lamb!

Remember that reconciliation becomes necessary when alienation has been caused in some way. So far, we have been discussing the alienation caused by our sins, which is only natural,

for that is of the most immediate concern to us. The Bible, however, speaks of several other causes of alienation, and these too have been dealt with by the reconciliation provided by the Lord Jesus.

In Adam

The first cause of alienation between us and God is the fact that we are 'in Adam'. Before ever I committed any sin of my own, I was alienated from God and under the sentence of death, because I am a child of Adam. Romans ch. 5 deals with this, and Paul is the only New Testament writer who brings out this truth. The relevant verses are 11 to 21, but I want you to notice that vv. 13 to 17 are a large parenthesis. So, for the moment, I will jump straight from the end of v. 12 to v. 18. This will give us the flow of Paul's argument with interruption.

"And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have received the reconciliation. Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned – therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life."

I want to stop there, at v. 18, not because the following verses are unimportant, but because I want to emphasise the point Paul makes in v. 18. In the earlier vv. of ch. 5 Paul is speaking about personal **sins**. But at v. 12, he moves into the area of **sin** – the fundamental flaw in us, our sinful nature, that causes us to commit sins, that predisposes us to go our own way rather than God's.

I can't overstress the importance of this point. One writer expresses it

very simply, but clearly, by saying: "A dog is not a dog because it barks. Rather, it barks because it is, by nature, a dog. Similarly, we are not sinners because we commit sins. Rather, we commit sins because we are, by nature, sinners."

Now, if you are anything like me, your reaction to being told that you are a sinner because you are a child of Adam, is that it is not fair. I did not ask to be born as a child of Adam. I did not ask to be born at all! I had nothing to do with it, so why should I suffer a penalty for something beyond my control? It is a fair question, and the answer is in the great truth of our Faith, that just as you had nothing to do with getting into this lost condition, God through Christ, provided the way out, without us having to do anything about that either.

One man brought sin and death by his one act of disobedience to all. Similarly, the righteous act of one Man brings to *all men* the free gift of justification of life. We need to be careful here. This does not mean that every child of Adam is saved. But it does mean that the alienation caused by being children of Adam is taken away by the reconciliation gained by the Lord's atoning sacrifice. Now we can move on to v. 19.

"For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous."

In v. 18, the righteous act of the Last Adam undoes the condemnation of the offense caused by the act of the first Adam, and the result flows to all men. But in v. 19, the obedience of the Last Adam, will make many (not all) righteous. The distinction is important.

Wonderful Words of Life

In this respect, God deals with humanity as a whole, on the basis of the two men called Adam. It can be summed up simply like this: As in Adam, so in Christ. When we become children of God by faith through grace, God transfers us from Adam to Christ – from death to life.

Alienation of the Gentile

The next alienation that calls for reconciliation is the alienation of the Gentile from God. As with the previous subject, we had nothing to do with it personally. It is ironic, to say the least, that the reconciliation in this area has been so complete that none of us would know that Gentiles were ever alienated from God simply on the basis of being Gentiles, if the Scriptures had not told us.

Romans 1 shows that after Noah's flood, as the race grew larger, they deliberately chose to turn away from God, even though they knew about God's attributes through the natural creation around them. It was because they turned away from God that God gave them up, and turned to one man through whom He would work to achieve His purposes. That man was Abraham.

Throughout the centuries during which God worked through the people of Israel, the Gentile world was left largely to its own devices, and during that long time, Israel was the avenue to God. The position of Gentiles relative to God throughout much of the Old Testament times is summed up by Paul in Ephesians 2:11-13:

"Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh – who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands – that at that time you were without Christ, being

aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ."

Paul is not saying that the Gentile has been brought near to Israel. No, he has been brought near to God, after having been in the position of being hopeless and without God.

It is true that, until the establishment of God's Covenant people, there were no Gentiles. But the alienated position of the Gentile world came about as a result of the actions recounted by Paul in Romans 1. It is significant that we see the reversal of the Gentile alienation in the book of Acts. From the conversion of Cornelius onward, the Gentile is being reconciled to God, and the reconciliation is on the basis of the shed blood of Christ. And this brings us to the next area of alienation that needed a reconciliation.

Alienation between Jew and Gentile.

As the Jew came in, way back in Genesis, the Gentile went out. In Acts, the Jew is on the way out, and the Gentile is on the way back in. Paul tells us in Romans 11, that Israel's stumbling is not that they might fall entirely from God's grace, but rather, that the Gentile might be blessed.

That there was a gulf of difference separating Jew and Gentile is no secret. Right from the calling of Abraham and the setting up of Israel as a nation, the Old Testament emphasises that Israel is different. They are not as the other nations. They behave differently, they eat differently and they worship differently. And even

in the assemblies of believers in the Acts years, there were still differences between the Jewish and Gentile believer. It was certainly true that 'in Christ there was neither Jew nor Gentile', but in practice there was a barrier between the two groups. Paul calls it 'the middle wall of partition or separation' in Eph. 2:14.

Jewish believers could and did worship in the Temple. Gentile believers could not. There was nothing in Peter's ministry to separate any Jew from the Temple. Their belief in the Messiah made them better Jews. But when Gentiles were converted, they did not become Jews! Then there were the decrees of Acts 15 governing the conduct of Gentile Believers. The very need for these decrees showed how difficult it was for Jewish believers to accept and fellowship with Gentile believers. While the years covered by Acts ran their course, these differences could be tolerated, but when the time came for the new calling of the ONE NEW MAN of the Dispensation of the Mystery, that middle wall had to come down. So in the Church which is His Body, the complete equality between Jew and Gentile, which was absent during the Acts years, became a practical reality. As I said above, this area of alienation has been so fully done away with, that most believers do not know it was ever any different.

This study is longer than I planned, but I could not leave any of it out. Much more could be said, but we have seen how God has broken down every barrier that separated us from Himself. It has all been done in and through the Lord Jesus Christ, and I trust that, with me, you rejoice in this wonderful word of life, reconciliation, and all it means to us. □

The Bible Tells Me So

By M. S. Lloyd

It has been told concerning a certain theologian of some prominence that he was asked, at the close of a broadcast interview, to sum up in one sentence the findings of a lifetime's research into the Scriptures. After a moment's reflection this great man responded with humility: "Jesus loves me, this I know for the Bible tells me so".

These lines from the well-known children's hymn, of which many of us have fond memories, embodies the most profound and basic of truths. For the love of God, that which is His very nature, has been declared in His Son, whose human name is Jesus, and it is unconditionally available to me. This blessed and amazing fact I may come to know, not through any channel based on human senses, but only by faith in the Word of God – only by believing what the Bible tells me.

For every individual, the growth of spiritual life – and the same principle applies to mental and intellectual life – springs from this fundamental seed of awareness of being loved by someone. The desire which emerges as this seed germinates and develops may well find expression in a phrase from another hymn – "More about Jesus I would know".

When my heart echoes this earnest desire, again I have to let the Bible tell me; for there is no other source of truth about Him. The Bible tells me how He became flesh and dwelt among mankind; how He suffered for the sins of others, including mine; how He died and rose again, and how God has exalted Him and given Him a name above every other name. Moreover, the Bible tells me that "God has made this same Jesus both Lord and Christ", so that I

learn to speak no longer of Him as Jesus, but to address Him with due honour as the Lord Jesus Christ.

Profound divine truths are almost always expressible in simple statements. Their assimilation is thus not beyond the reach of those of lowly intellect who can embrace them by simple faith – and really there is no other kind of faith. But the Enemy of Truth is always at hand to promote equally simple variations designed to look attractive, but which in fact pervert the purity of an expression.

The writer was associated in earlier years with a Christian group who decided to 'improve' the first line of our hymn "Jesus loves me" to "Jesus loves me, this I know and the Bible tells me so". How innocent the change looks, yet how devastating! By this slight change, the authority of the Bible, which is the sole repository of knowledge about the Lord Jesus Christ, is thus relegated to a mere secondary role of backing up 'knowledge' presumably acquired through another channel.

But a conviction reached by feelings or by the senses is sensual and not spiritual, for though 'there is a way that seemeth right', as this does, the sensual man is not able to receive that which is only to be received through the spirit. It may be, then, no surprise that those Christians who permitted this subtle and supposedly harmless deviation in the words of a hymn, eventually came to the position where human ministry is accepted as having the authority of the Holy Spirit, independent of what is stated in the written Word of God.

Dr. E. W. Bullinger once wrote, "We may divide people into two great classes with regard to their treatment of the Bible:

1. those who put the Bible above everything.
 2. those who put something above the Bible.
- (From "Selected Writings")

There is just no escaping from those two categories. Either the Bible is the supreme and only authority, or something else is usurping its place. It can no more be accorded a position alongside anything else, than can the One of whom it testifies be accorded any other position than that of absolute supremacy.

It must be said, however, that the hymn we have quoted is by no means as true to biblical truth in all its lines as it is in its first two. The Bible does not tell me that the Lord Jesus Christ died to open wide the gates of Heaven. But it does tell me that He has the keys to Hades and of Death, and when the time comes, He will call the name of each of His own who sleep in death and then 'the gates of Hades shall not prevail' against those He calls – His Out-calling or Ecclesia.

So while we are thankful for the truth expressed in the first two lines of the hymn, we must be ever vigilant to resist any and every attempt to dethrone the unique source of truth that we have in the sacred Scripture. And I pray that each reader, as I can, can affirm with Professor Karl Barth, that 'Jesus loves me, this I know for the Bible tells me so.

(This article is taken from an old copy of the magazine "Corn in Egypt", published in England. To the best of our knowledge, it is no longer published.) □

Stephen

When I looked at the conversion of Cornelius several issues ago, I mentioned that I was jumping over material that we would need to return to. So In this article, I want to go back several chapters in Acts to an event that is as significant in the plans of God at the time covered by the book of Acts as is the conversion of Cornelius. I refer to the witness and martyrdom of Stephen.

The witness of the Apostles in Acts was attended by some good successes. There were three thousand 'converts' in Acts 2:4, while the number of five thousand is mentioned in Acts 4:4, although this might be the progressive total, rather than another five thousand. Then in Acts 21:20, when Paul and some of his colleagues had come to Jerusalem with an offering for the Jerusalem church, he was told by the elders, among other things, that 'myriads' (i.e. thousands) of Jews had believed. Now, these numbers would be very gratifying to any evangelist today, yet, in spite of those 'myriads of Jews' who had believed, it was not enough for God's purposes at that time. Nothing less than the repentance of the whole nation was required, for it was the nation, not just a few thousand of them, who were to become God's royal priesthood ministering to the other nations of the world.

There were, however, problems that arose in the community of believers because of these rather large numbers. The concluding three verses of Acts 2 are not only significant, but highly relevant. I quote vv. 44 to 47 from the New King James Version:

"Now all who believed were together, and had all things in

common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved."

It is not apparent to most of us Gentiles why those early believers disposed of all their belongings, and pooled everything. The short answer is that they knew that the Lord's return would usher in a year of Jubilee, in which all debts would be cancelled, and all Jewish families would regain possession of the land that was their inheritance in Israel. I will have to leave you to read about the Year of Jubilee for yourself in Leviticus 25.

In the beginning of Acts 6, we read of a dispute that arose amongst the believers. There were two groups, one lot called Hebrews, the others called Hellenists. That term does not mean what we might first think. They were not Greeks, but Jews from countries outside Palestine who spoke Greek, whereas the others spoke Hebrew, or probably, Aramaic, which is an offshoot of Hebrew. The dispute centred around the distribution of food, in which the widows in the Hellenist group were being neglected. In the discussion that followed, the twelve Apostles appointed seven men of good standing to take care of the food administration, and possibly, other business matters. These men were called deacons, and one of them was Stephen. The scheme worked well, and the company of believers grew rapidly.

In v. 8 of ch. 6, the narrative focuses on Stephen, who through the power of the Holy Spirit, was able to perform remarkable miracles – called signs and wonders – amongst the people. He also reasoned with his countrymen in a particular synagogue, and v. 10 tells us that they were not able resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spoke. By the way, note that the particular synagogue where this took place was attended by people who had come from Cyrene, Alexandria, Cilicia and Asia. We will learn a little later that a certain Saul, who is destined to play a big role in developing events, came from Tarsus in – Cilicia! I am making an assumption here, but it would be reasonable to expect that Saul would attend the synagogue where fellow Cilicians would gather. I also suspect that when the Lord said to Saul, when he was struck down on the road to Damascus, that it was hard for him to kick against the pricks, this referred partly to Saul's inability to gain the better of Stephen in the Scriptural debates.

In 6:11, the men who could not prove Stephen wrong, stirred up trouble and had Stephen arrested and brought before the Sanhedrin, as the word is in the Greek text. Here Stephen was falsely accused. Ch. 7 gives us Stephen's defense, which is a marvellous recounting of Israel's history. It is beyond our scope to go through the details of this chapter, but I do want you to notice the point Stephen makes using both Joseph and Moses as examples. Look at v. 13: "And the second time Joseph was made known to his brothers ..."

In v. 20, Stephen gets to Moses, and makes the point that Moses thought that the Israelites would

Stephen

know that he was to deliver them from Egypt (v. 25) but he was rejected. Note the words said to Moses in v. 27. "Who made you a ruler and a judge over us?" In effect, Moses was rejected the first time he offered himself to his people, and it was not until he came the second time, that they followed him.

In v. 35 Stephen says: "This Moses whom they rejected, saying 'Who made you a ruler and a judge?' is the one God sent to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the Angel who appeared to him in the bush." Stephen finally charges these leaders of Israel with doing the same as their forefathers. They always resisted the leadings of God's Holy Spirit, and, in v. 52, he accuses them of murdering the Just One of whom the prophets had spoken. These words made them furious, so much so, that 'they gnashed at him with their teeth'. Stephen, however, was beyond their reach by this time. He was given a vision of the Lord – the Son of Man – standing at the right hand of God. They could not listen to this blasphemy, as they thought it, and rushed him out of the city and stoned him to death.

Stephen said two things as he was dying. Firstly, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit", and secondly, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin." I have read that this was a similar prayer to that prayed by the Lord as He was being nailed to the cross, but I submit to you that it is different, and the difference is significant.

The Lord prayed, "Father, forgive them for they don't know what they are doing." Stephen prayed, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin." As we see the difference in what Stephen said, we will come a long

way towards understanding what Stephen's death was all about.

It may seem inexplicable to us, but it was true that the Jews did not know that Jesus of Nazareth was their Messiah. But in the years that passed between the Crucifixion and Stephen's death – some scholars estimate about five years – a very clear witness had been made as to whom Jesus really was. This witness had been accompanied by great signs and wonders, done by many others besides the Twelve, so that when they put Stephen to death, they were without excuse. Stephen's prayer was not for forgiveness because of ignorance, but that they be not charged with their crime.

In the next two chapters, we are given details of various events that show us how the circle of witness widened from Jerusalem, following the pattern laid down by the Lord in Acts 1:8. **But to all intents and purposes, the record of the witness concerning Jesus of Nazareth in the Jewish homeland of Palestine comes to its climax with the murder of Stephen.**

There were, however, many Jews living outside of Palestine, and they too, must hear the good news concerning Jesus. This great Jewish company outside Palestine were called the Diaspora, a Greek word meaning the Dispersion. An important point to note is, that, while this second offer of Jesus as Israel's Messiah and Deliverer was being made, both in Palestine and in the world around the Mediterranean Sea, the Temple still stood in Jerusalem, Moses' Law was still operating, and the Hope of the believers was inextricably tied up with the promises of God to the nation of Israel. This means that we must

distinguish between the epistles written during the Acts period, and those written after the end of Acts, for the company of believers and their relevant Hope, is different after the Acts period finished.

Back at Acts 7 and 8, the focus of the narrative quite quickly shifts from Jerusalem to places outside the borders of Palestine. Peter, after his mission to Cornelius, almost disappears and the centre stage is taken over by the one who came to be called Paul.

Just as the witness in the homeland was rejected, so the witness to the Diaspora was likewise rejected, which brought the nation of Israel to a terrible end. But that comes later. □

**Only 4
months
until the
BBFA
CONFERENCE
2007**

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

Sept 22nd -24th
2007

Venue: Camp
Toukley NSW

All

(Originally printed in *The Babblers*, No. 10, March 1950 and reprinted in Issue No. 54, April 1964)

If there is one word in the Bible which needs to be carefully dealt with, it is that little word "All". There is always the temptation to give it the widest possible meaning, and then to prove all sorts of queer things from its interpretation. One friend who wished to prove that John the Baptist baptized by sprinkling rather than by immersion, pointed to Matt. 3:5, where it says, "Then went out unto him Jerusalem and ALL Judea and ALL the region round about Jordan, and were baptized of him". Then he said that as there must have been at least five million people, John could not possibly have baptized them one at a time by immersion. He just sprinkled them with water as they went by. His idea of the word ALL in that verse was every man, woman and child in all the towns and villages of Judea; not exactly what was meant, you may be sure.

In Phil. 4:18 Paul says, "For I have ALL and abound". Had he got all? I think there were a good many things we could point out that he did not have. We know what he meant, of course, from the context. So also in Acts 19:19: "Many of them also which used curious arts, brought their books together and burned them before ALL men". What, before everybody in the world? How could they? In Job 4:15, Eliphaz the Temanite says, "Fear came upon me ... which made ALL my bones shake". What, all of them? Even the little ones in his toes? Well, of course, you know what he means, and that is just the point, it is the context that makes it clear.

I am moved to point out this little matter with regard to the word ALL because one correspondent has

asked me to read Colossians 1:15-20, 1 Timothy 2:3-6 and 1 Corinthians 15:20-28, and says, "Do we believe?" Well, I know what my correspondent wants us to believe when we read those passages, and that is that one day there will be restoration and reconciliation for Satan himself and the fallen angels, also for unrepentant sinners however gross they may have been. So we must look at these passages, because we have always understood that Satan and the fallen angels, and also unrepentant sinners would be destroyed in the lake of fire.

So now let us look at Colossians 1:15-20. In verse 16 it says, "For by Him were all things created". Now, remembering what we said about the word "all", we say to ourselves, "What is meant by the word 'all' in this connection?" Well, we are not left in any doubt, because v. 16 goes onto say, "things that are in heaven, and that are on earth, visible and invisible ...". Well, that seems to embrace most things, but wait a minute. We get similar words four verses lower down. Verse 20: "to reconcile all things ... whether things in earth, or things in heaven." These things are to be reconciled 'through the blood of His cross', and we 'who were sometime alienated and enemies ... by wicked works' are to be presented 'holy and unblameable ... in His sight'. – IF we continue – verse 23. So there is an IF about it.

Again, earlier in the chapter, verse 13, speaks of delivering us from the power of darkness. Is the 'power of darkness' included in the all things here? Can we have light and darkness at the same time? Then again, He made peace through the blood of His cross'

(verse 20). Now through that same cross (Ch. 2:14, 15) we find that He spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it'. Yes, there is reconciliation for *us* 'through the blood of His cross', but not reconciliation for *them* – the powers of darkness; over them, He triumphs. So we must be sure to get the meaning of the whole chapter, and not just a few verses.

One fully recognizes, of course, that when the powers of darkness – and any who may be consigned to the lake of fire – are completely *destroyed*, then – when the victory is complete – we shall see 'all things in subjection under Him' (Hebrews 2:8).

Some suggest that if "All things were made by Him" (Col. 1:16), then Satan, the fallen angels and sin itself were made by Him. Oh no! We know what was made by Him, and that is a *moral* universe, not a mechanical one. He did not create robots, He created responsible beings – beings who could choose. Satan chose rebellion, and dragged down the fallen angels and sowed sin into the world. He and all his, and all the powers of darkness must be utterly destroyed before we see 'all things in subjection under Him'.

The next passage is 1 Timothy 2:3-6. Again the little word 'all' comes along. Verse 4 says, "Who will have all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth". Now in that verse the word we want to be sure of is the word 'will'. In English it may mean 'determine' or only 'wish'. Let us look at the Greek. The word used is 'thelei'. In sixteen places I see it is translated 'desires' or 'desirous'. The Greek words for 'determine'

.....cont Pg. 10

The Wonder of God's Love

– by Alan Humbley

Before reading the following, please read Romans 5:6-11.

Those verses contain great truth for everybody – for the saved and the unsaved, the Christian and the non-Christian – because in them is stated the truth about the human condition, and what God has done to rescue us. Rescue us from what, you may ask? Verse 9 of Romans 5 tells us that we are saved from God's wrath through Christ Jesus. We don't hear much about God's wrath these days, do we? And in days of old when we did, it was often used as a tool by the church to ensure that people toed the official line out of fear.

But the wrath of God, my friends, is not some wilful, spiteful, or petulant rage that arises because we are not obeying every rule in His divine rule book! It is the righteous indignation of a pure and holy God against the thing that offends Him beyond our capacity to understand – and that, of course, is sin! And because we are sinners, we are steeped in sin. The fact that this very word 'sin' is not heard nearly as often as it used to be from the pulpit these days does not make it any less a reality, nor any less the sole issue that has brought separation between man and God.

The Bible makes it clear that God can and will have nothing whatsoever to do with sin. It also makes it clear that we are all born sinners – *sinful at birth and sinful from the time my mother conceived me* is how David puts it in Psalm 51. And that is the plight we find ourselves in, along with all of humanity. It is a plight of universal despair. And it is from this perspective we must see our Scripture portion.

Verse 6, where we commenced, states that *at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly*. What is Paul talking about when he says 'when we were still powerless'? Powerless about what? I think we need to acknowledge that mankind finds it extremely offensive to be described as powerless.

The truth is, however, that we were powerless to do anything about our sinfulness. Mankind was, and we still are, sinners all, born and bred. We are sinners by nature and that's all there is to it.

One of the greatest points of error here is this: people like to think that they are sinners because they commit sins, and that if they just stopped committing sins, they would no longer be sinners. One good reason that is wrong is that it doesn't acknowledge the powerlessness that we have just read of in verse 6. It is not in our power to stop sinning.

I have heard a very good friend of mine ask this question on a number of occasions: 'Is a dog a dog because it barks? Or does it bark because it is a dog?' And the next question is this: 'Are we sinners because we sin? Or do we sin because we are sinners?' I don't think you need me to expound on that. The answer is obvious. We sin because we are sinners and are powerless to do otherwise.

God, being God, knows all about our sorry condition, and He knew that the only hope for the humanity He had created and that He loved, was that He would take action on our behalf.

In the song that he wrote so many years ago, George Beverly Shea captured something of the wonder of God's love – "Oh, the wonder of it all, just to think that God loves me!"

My friends, I want to tell you that the wonder of it all will never touch you until you are able to see the true extent of your sinfulness and your powerlessness in the grip of sin. But when the truth breaks in on you, you will be overwhelmed by the wonder that, in spite of all that you are and all that you do, God loves you. It is beyond our understanding.

And verse 8 tells us that **God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us**. Real love is not just an emotion, not just a feeling. Real love acts, it does something. So, God acted on our behalf; He demonstrated His love for us. And this is how He did it: *While we were still sinners, Christ died for us*.

Now we can easily fall into the trap of thinking that, unfortunate and undesirable as it may be, our sinfulness is just a blight on our human character that makes us undesirable to God – much as bad breath or body odour can render us undesirable in human society – and that God, in His love was able to cope with that, and love us nonetheless. But if we think that, we still don't get it. We are missing the point. We are cutting ourselves a lot of slack. We are in denial. We are not acknowledging that without Christ we are still powerless. The problem is not that we have a few sins to deal with – or even a great many sins to deal with – but that we **are sinners!** O the wonder of it all, just to think that God loves me!

Do you remember what you read in our Scripture portion? It tells us that we were (and without Christ, we still are) powerless, and that we are sinners. But verse 10 goes

The Wonder of God's Love

further and says that we were God's enemies.

People don't react very well to being told that they are God's enemies. They would much rather think of themselves as His disobedient children; naughty children, perhaps, but still children of their Heavenly Father. But that is just not right! In fact, it is plain wrong! The Bible makes it abundantly clear that it is only by coming to saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ – in who He is and what He has done for us – that we are able to become the children of God. Ephesians chapter 2 tells us that in our natural state we are separate from Christ and without hope in the world, but now in Christ Jesus, we who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. Romans 8:7 says that 'the carnal mind is enmity against God', or as the NIV has it, 'the sinful mind is hostile to God.' The carnal mind (or the sinful mind) is simply a name used in Scripture for our old nature, the sinful human nature we are born with.

It is only through the blood of Christ, and through faith in what He has done for us, and by the miracle of the new birth, that we are brought into relationship with God and are able to call Him our Heavenly Father.

The Bible teaches that in our natural state we are enemies of God. Understand clearly what the Word is saying. We are enemies of God and not the other way around. We are at enmity with God. The fault is all on our side. God is not at enmity with us nor can we say that He has ever been our enemy. He loves mankind but can have nothing whatsoever to do with sin; therefore something must

be done for us before we can come into relationship with Him.

Do you see the wonder of what our Scripture portion is telling us? Let me remind you:

6) You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. 7) Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. 8) But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 9) Since we have now been justified by His blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through Him! 10) For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through His life.

Friends, I just want to ask you a few simple questions.

* Have you ever realised the heinousness, the absolute offensiveness of your sin to God and that because of it, you can never stand in His Holy presence?

* Have you ever truly realised that, in your natural state and apart from Christ, you are at enmity with God? The realisation that apart from the grace of God and his gift of eternal life in Christ, you are and can only ever be, at enmity with God, should rock you to your very foundations.

* Have you ever been overwhelmed by the sense of your own powerlessness to overcome your sin and the lower instincts of your nature?

It is a good thing to recognise the truth about yourself. As a matter of fact, it is essential if you are ever to come into the knowledge of the greatest truth of all. And it is only as you grasp this truth that you will be able to gasp with surprise, "Oh,

the wonder of it all – just to think that God loves me."

Perhaps you have never experienced the love of God, or just realised for the first time the extent of the love that God has for you. John has written these words (1 John 3:1): *How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!*

Perhaps for the first time in your life you have become aware of what it means when we are told that God has demonstrated His own love for us in this: while we were still sinners – and while we were still His enemies – Christ died for us.

Perhaps you have, finally, been hit right between the eyes by the wonder of it all – just to know that, in spite of all that you are and all that you have done – God loves you. □



All

.....cont from Pg. 8

are 'bouleoumai', 'epilus' or 'krino'. So if we translated that verse, "Whose desire is to have all men to be saved", we shall be more near the original meaning.

The last passage referred to is 1 Corinthians 15:20-28. It seems to me that this passage answers itself. One verse says, "The last enemy to be *destroyed* is death". So you see, some enemies will meet with destruction, not reconciliation. When that has taken place, then we shall realize that "He hath put all things under His feet" (v. 27). □

The Supreme Riches of God

From the writings of the late David Fryer

The supreme riches of God are the subject of Paul's Prison letters. Is the Lord going to trust them to foolish people? Now we all lack wisdom, but the remedy is provided by God. "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God ..." James 5:1.

Divine wisdom leads to divine understanding – also a gift of God – and these both lead to a walk that is worthy of the Lord. Enoch pleased God, and was translated, Gen. 5:24, Heb. 11:5. We, too, as members of the Body of Christ, are 'translated'. Col. 1:13 says, "The Father ... hath translated us from the power of darkness and hath translated us into the Kingdom of His dear Son".

The worthy walk is expressed in three ways in Paul's prison letters: 'walk worthy of the calling', Eph. 4:1; 'walk worthy of the Gospel', Phil. 1:27; 'walk worthy of the Lord', Col. 1:10. In this last verse, Paul likens such a walk to bearing fruit, and from this comes a growing knowledge of God. It also means that spiritual growth comes from acknowledging God's claims.

Both statements are important. We only grow spiritually as we respond to the truth God has already given. Also, our Heavenly Father only gives more truth when we act on what we already possess.

Paul prayed that believers might be empowered with Christ's resurrection power, by which He conquered death and was exalted to the supreme position at the Father's right hand. This mighty power is 'to usward who believe', and its practical apprehension is all we need to face up to all opposition and trials that would test our faith.

From this comes a threefold fruit – patience, longsuffering and joyfulness. Patience is better rendered 'endurance', i.e. the steady persistence of an athlete who continues right to the goal without giving up. Longsuffering will stand up to provocation without retaliation or bitterness. The Christian grace of 'joy' will transform the two previous fruits and make the whole attractive for Christ.

We should also have a grateful spirit. "Giving thanks unto the Father, who has made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." One of the worst faults of human nature is ingratitude, and ingratitude in view of the supreme work of the Father described here is to sink low indeed.

Our Father has fitted us for a tremendous goal, which is nothing less than an inheritance in the heavenly holiest of all in the light. This eclipses any blessings that Israel possessed, great as those were. No Israelite would dream of dwelling in this most sacred place. Indeed, the Israelite never entered the Holy of Holies once! The High Priest alone had the privilege of entering the Holy of Holies, and then only on the Day of Atonement. In this, he was a type of Christ, who entered 'within the veil' in the true, heavenly Tabernacle after His resurrection, Hebrews 6:19, 20.

But the Body of Christ is so favoured that it will not only enter Heaven's most sacred place, but will dwell there permanently, for it is there, in the heavenlies, and not on earth, where their inheritance is. Each believer is a living stone in this Heavenly Temple, the habitation of God. This is the

tremendous goal for which the Father has fitted us. How grateful in our lives and in our walk we should be!

Paul also reminds us that in the past, we were delivered and translated from darkness and Satan's authority into His dear Son's Kingdom (Col. 1:13). The word 'deliver' means to 'rescue from danger'. We were in danger in our unsaved state, under the condemnation of death.'

Ephesians 6:12 refers to the 'rulers of the darkness of this world' under Satan's control. These evil principalities and powers were defeated by Christ at Calvary (Col. 2:15), but they still seek to overthrow us, and it is against them we wrestle. The whole might of these Satanic forces was directed against the Son of God at Gethsemane to prevent Him reaching the Cross and accomplishing His complete victory over them all. (Luke 22:53). Calvary means final victory over every foe for all the redeemed.

The basis for our translation from Satan's kingdom into the glories of the heavenly phase of Christ's Kingdom is redemption through the blood of Christ Col. 1:14. May our hearts be always lifted up in praise and thanks to Him who loved us and gave Himself for us.

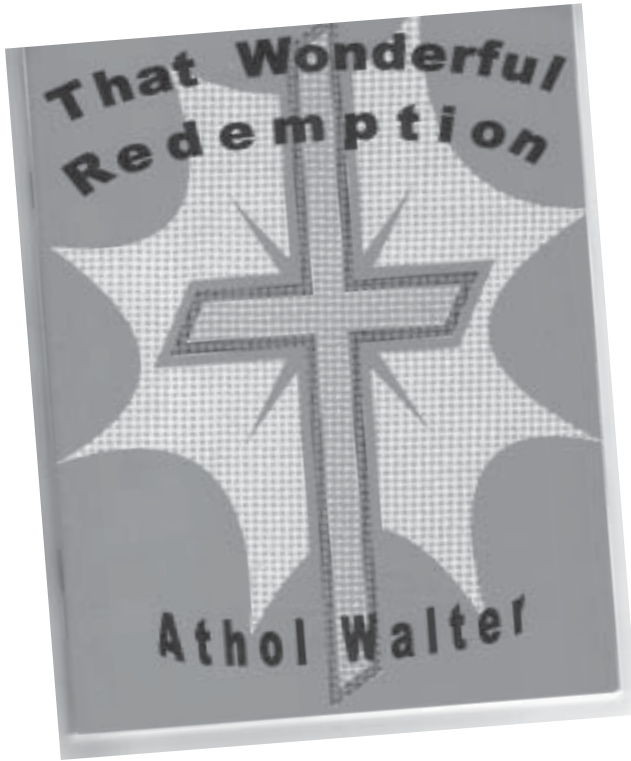
□

Email News!

To help us maintain our records accurately would each recipient currently registered to receive Spiritual Blessings electronically please confirm their email address to bbfa@spiritualblessings.org Many thanks!

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.

Spiritual Blessings

The official journal of the
Berean Bible Fellowship of Australia Inc.

Visit our Web Site:
www.spiritualblessings.org

Articles which honour The Lord Christ Jesus, and acknowledge the principle of right division will be considered for publication. All articles are accepted on the basis that they may be used as the BBFA sees fit unless otherwise requested by the author. The interpretation of Scripture by various authors is not necessarily the one held by the majority of the Fellowship.

BBFA Postal Address:

Box 3141
GLENDALE, NSW 2285
AUSTRALIA

The journal is registered by Australia Post
PP255003/00975.

The BBFA Tenets:

1. Full Inspiration of the Scriptures.
2. The Deity of Christ.
3. All sufficiency of Christ's One Sacrifice.
4. The Bible study principle of right division.

The BBFA Committee:

President: John Hutton.
V-President: Athol Walter.
Treasurer: Sue Hall.
Secretary: Margaret Abbott.
Committee members: Frank Haegler, Robin Ward,
Neville Ward.

Visit our web site: www.spiritualblessings.org

What's there?

Great Bible study articles & charts,
printable back issues of Spiritual Blessings,
catalogue of our huge range of literature, tapes, etc
and so much more.

