

Scripture Truth



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"The time is near"
The Fourth Gospel

It is time to wake up!
The collapse of Christendom
Paul's neglected letter: Galatians

SCRIPTURE TRUTH

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The collapse of Christendom

We are living through truly epochal times. Christendom – meaning the compact between “church” and “state”, whereby the state made Christianity the privileged religion, or even sole legal religion, in return for the church promoting obedience to the state – has almost entirely collapsed in the last thirty years or so.

Christendom may be said to have commenced in the Roman empire during the fourth century AD. It was a process rather than an event, and it culminated in an imperial edict of 391 which deprived pagan ceremonies of legal protection. (The extinction of paganism took a lot longer, of course.) About that time zealous missionary priests and monks began sallying forth to smash pagan temples and “convert” entire populations – whereas the real gospel usually brings division (Luke 12:51ff.; Acts 28:24). As a result, myriads began to consider themselves Christians on the basis that they had been christened – a rite that provided them with “Christian names”. (This state of affairs certainly aided evangelism after the Reformation, by making it a matter of awakening those who thought of themselves as already Christians to a realisation of what the gospel truly is.)

Schools in Britain taught the ten commandments until at least the 1950s, and it could be fairly said that the laws of Britain were based on the Bible. But since the 1990s the pushing of Christianity to the margins has been proceeding apace in well-known ways. We are witnessing the collapse of Christendom after a successful run of 1600 years.

It is, however, questionable whether there ought ever to have been a Christendom. Its existence was a strange turn of affairs for a movement professing to be identified with a crucified, risen, and ascended Saviour. So we ought not to “lose heart” (2 Corinthians 4:16, NKJV). During nearly the last five centuries, living as a Christian in Britain has not absolutely demanded the daily life of faith. Now, for many, it does, especially for parents. But take heart! children are the only class of general mankind with their own angels (Matthew 18:10). God can make “a way of escape” (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Finally, the collapse of Christendom underlines that “our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ...” (Philippians 3:20).

T. BALDERSTON

The Fourth Gospel

Gordon Hughes

“This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and His disciples believed on Him. “ (John 2:11)

“And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book: 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.” (John 20:30,31)

In our New Testament, John occupies a distinct place as the last of four complementary accounts of the Lord Jesus. Each approaches the matter from a separate viewpoint, enabling us to obtain a living sense of His great Person as seen from many angles. Matthew, with the Jew in mind, presents Him as the rightful King, whose rejection was so serious. Mark seems to address Roman readers; he draws attention to the perfect Servant, of God and men, seen in that busy pathway of devotion. Luke, thinking perhaps of his Greek readership, focuses principally on the pure and holy Manhood of that One so pleasing to God. But John picks out the Son of God, demonstrating here all that God is – revealing His Father’s love.

The purpose of John’s Gospel is as stated in chapter 20, quoted above. “That ye might believe that Jesus is the Son of God,” and thus have life through His Name. In keeping with this emphasis, the word “believe’ occurs some 90-100 times in this Gospel.

John had a problem, in view of many other things also in his memory. Chapter 21 also refers to this, right at the close. So he selected certain things only – guided by the Holy Spirit. He picked out *seven* signs, pointers to the glory of the Person to whom they draw attention. Chapter 2:11 says that this was the effect of the first of these signs – promoting belief from the disciples. The last of these signs, too, before the events are described, begins with our Lord’s words “This (Lazarus’s) sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified thereby” (11:4). There are in fact two words for “miracle” in the New Testament, one signifying *powerful* actions (as

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some 90-100 times in this Gospel*

*These miracles are signposts
signalling the glory of the Lord Jesus*

in the phrase, “the *power* of God unto salvation,” for instance), but the other, *meaningful* as well as impressive actions. The latter is John’s word. The word is best rendered “*signs*”.

These miracles are therefore *signposts* pointing the way – signalling the glory of the Lord Jesus, inviting our faith in Him. This then will help us in seeing the pattern of John’s Gospel. The seven signs form the framework. These are: first, the water changed into wine at the wedding in Cana; then, the healing of the nobleman’s son (end of chapter 4); next, the helpless man at the pool of Bethesda (chapter 5); fourth, and centrally among the seven, the five thousand fed (chapter 6); fifth, in the same chapter, the walking on the sea; in chapter 9, the blind man receiving his sight at Siloam; finally, the raising of Lazarus from the grave, and from corruption (chapter 11).

What a sequence this is! How many vital and precious *words* centre on, and flow out from, these marvellous deeds of His! Let us make some general points arising from these passages.

From first to last His glory is manifested. His whole concern was for the glory of God. While in a certain sense our Lord’s glory was veiled, yet there were times when it *must* burst forth. Unlike men generally, the Lord did not seek His own glory (John 8:50 says this). He was concerned only for the glory of His Father who sent Him. But His glory *was* manifested in many situations. He could not be hid! Then, notice how He is at home, and seems to take charge, in *all* places – in homes, in crowds, where there is joy, where there is grief, and with solitary needy individuals. He is Master of every situation!

Of the seven signs the feeding of the five thousand stands at the centre. It has a prominence in the Gospels, being the only miracle recorded in each Gospel. The division among the spectators comes into prominence from this point too.

*Notice how He is at home,
and seems to take charge, in all places*

*Of the seven signs
the feeding of the five thousand stands at the centre.*

Peter's clear outspokenness about the Lord Jesus at the close of the passage (chapter 6) is perhaps one of the high points of the Gospel.

There are, of course, several other things occurring in sevens to be noted in the Gospels. The seven sayings from the Cross, and the seven "I am" sayings, readily come to mind. The seven "I am" words all belong to *this* Gospel and, like the "signs", are wonderful expressions in which the Lord Jesus bears witness to Himself. Their content is closely geared to the context, and in step with the sequence of signs upon which John, under the Holy Spirit, is framing the Gospel.

A list of these great sayings must suffice. "I am *the bread of life*" comes first; followed by *the Light of the world* (twice); then *the Door*; *the Good Shepherd*; *the Resurrection and the Life*; *the Way, the Truth and the Life*; and, last, *the True Vine*. Central here is *the Good Shepherd*, who *lays down His life* for the sheep. That "laying down", surely, is both central and crucial.

We have been proceeding on general lines so far. Now we shall make a very brief stop at the places in each of the accounts of the seven signs where the glory of our blessed Lord is pointed out. First is the marriage at Cana in Galilee (2:1-11). Key verses perhaps are verses 2 and 11. A marriage is a *joyful* occasion, and wine is a picture of joy. Receiving Jesus, as this couple did, brings us into Christian joy – joy that does not run short. We have not started the Christian life until we have received *Him*, and at the start we little realise how great a person we have with us.

Then secondly the healing of the nobleman's son at the very word of Jesus – from a distance, and without visible miracle at all – shows the power of our Lord's word, and the kind of bare reliance on it that really honours Him. At first, he asked the Lord to go to Capernaum to meet the need – in itself a real faith in Jesus (John 4:47). But "thy son liveth" (v. 50) was enough for the nobleman – believing without seeing is a better and truer faith in our Lord, as Thomas also was told later (20:29). On the return to Capernaum, the report that the cure came exactly at the moment when the word was spoken showed how right his response had been.

The third sign, the man at Bethesda, perhaps, has its key verse in 5:9. The man had been hopelessly impotent. The pool was the congregating point for such people. Cures *did* occur, rarely, there. There was nothing wrong with the pool, apart from the disappointment when the faint hope it brought was dashed, year by year. Powerless he indeed was, with no power in himself. But power was found in Another who came that way. Power is found (in believing) in Christ (Romans 1:16, Philippians 4:13). The pool, and the ordinances of the law, were by-passed altogether. Life is received, and the man walks! Note what vital teaching, centred on the Person of Christ, comes out of this ‘sign’.

The five thousand fed, and the discourse on “the Bread of Life” that ensues in chapter 6 – how significant *this* is! The crowds fasten on the material provision, and He is popular for that reason. But He speaks of receiving life of the spiritual kind, *eternal* life – contrasting it even with an undoubted miracle of the past, the manna from heaven. In a sense we have a double “sign” here. Life has to be obtained first – eternal life is in receiving (“eating”) Him, the Bread of life; Life is *obtained* from Him, but also is *sustained* by feeding on Him.

The walking on the water seems almost hidden away within that great chapter 6. We pick out verse 20 here, “It is I; be not afraid.” Despite wonderful experiences recently, now they are in acute trouble without Him. So it is in any realistic Christian experience. When all is topsy-turvy, when everything seems to be falling apart in storms, He is the Master and His presence dismisses fear. He draws near to bring a calm and to impart peace. This too made a deep impression on His disciples.

The sixth sign, in chapter 9 – the man born blind receiving sight at the pool of Siloam – impressed many and stirred much controversy. A good heading to this incident would be *The blessing of obedience*. The essence of the story is in verse 7, “he went ... and washed and came seeing”. Attempts to dispute it gathered, and arguments arose, but the man proved patently true to his benefactor, and in his open simplicity he nonplussed his critics and exposed their insincerity and antipathy to the Lord. The man received his sight, but also his perception of the glory of Christ developed. He became a believer, a disciple, and (helped to progress by Jesus Himself) a worshipper – a good

*Life is obtained from Him,
but also is sustained by feeding on Him*

*How much we need His touch upon our eyes
to be able to see things as He sees them*

example surely of what John the writer seeks to promote among his readers. Happy indeed that day when we could first cry, “I was blind, now I see”! But in a world where *our* thinking is easily influenced by the standards common around us, how much we need His touch upon our eyes to be able to see things as He sees them (Revelation 3:18).

Notice that the Lord Himself, beforehand, spoke of the blind man’s plight as a situation in which “the glory of God” might be manifested (9:3). A similar comment from the Lord Jesus precedes the last ‘sign’ the raising of Lazarus in chapter 11. “This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby” (v. 4). Even the delay, so that Lazarus died before Jesus arrived, made the display of His glory more comprehensive, bringing in His power over death and corruption. The key moment is picked out in verses 43, 44 – the cry with a loud voice, and the response from the very burial-place. It stirred the few in deeper devotion, as the next chapter relates. But the plans to do away with Him were all the more determined too.

One of the remarkable features of this incident is the tender sympathy of the Lord Jesus with the two sisters, weeping with them, feeling intensely the weight of the human plight, yet knowing full well what He would do. Truly this “sign” embodies *many* facets of His glory! The *loud voice* that called Lazarus back to life reminds us of the loud voice from the Cross, when the basic work which even defeated death was *done!* Again that loud voice is yet to be heard – when “all that are in the graves shall hear His voice” and “the last enemy” shall be destroyed (John 5:28; 1 Corinthians 15:26; 1 Thessalonians 4:16).

Those who have lived for years within the atmosphere of John’s Gospel know that, as yet, they have only touched the fringe of its vast content. But we must begin by entering “the shallows”: and surely the guidelines which John indicated, by the Holy Spirit, will be the best to follow.

*From Scripture Truth, July 1986, based on an address given in Bradford.
Gordon Hughes was joint, then sole, editor of Scripture Truth from 1992-2006.
The Lord called him home on 30th April 2021.*

A sorry tale: Jacob, Esau, Isaac, and Rebekah

Genesis 27

F. B. Hole

None of the actors comes out of Genesis 27 well. But who got the blessing, and why?

The two verses that close chapter 26 of Genesis show us that at the age of forty Esau had developed a mind altogether opposed to that of both Abraham and Isaac, who made no alliance with the Canaanites. By contrast Esau established the most intimate connection, that of marriage, with two Hittite women. He thus brushed aside the thought of taking a wife from their own kindred (contrast 24:3,4), and linked himself with the people of the land, whose iniquity would worsen until their judgment fell some three to four hundred years later (cp. 15:16). Previously Esau had despised the birthright (25:29-34); now he despised a restriction that had Divine sanction. The call of God was nothing to him. His marriage was a grief of mind to his parents and a challenging of the purpose of God.

In chapter 27 we see the “governmental” result beginning to manifest itself. Isaac does not now appear in a very favourable light, nor indeed does Rebekah. Both were marked by favouritism, as had been stated in verse 28 of the 25th chapter, and were governed by their own special fancies. Isaac’s loss of sight made him anticipate death a good many years before it came to him, and he was anxious to bestow the blessing on Esau, in spite of the fact that before birth it had been indicated that Esau was to serve Jacob (25:23). Isaac was thus

*The call of God was nothing to Esau.
His marriage was a grief of mind to his parents
and a challenging of the purpose of God*

*Isaac was thus attempting
to defeat the purpose of God*

attempting to defeat the purpose of God, and the chapter reveals how his effort failed.

Rebekah, on the other hand, knew what God's purpose was, but in her anxiety for the blessing of her favourite son she resorted to a calculated course of deceit in order to trick her blind husband. She instigated the deceit, and Jacob practised it with success. Later episodes in Jacob's life reveal him to us as a man who was a master of artful and even underhand designs. It is a solemn thought that he got the earliest recorded lesson in this kind of thing from his mother. His bartering with Esau as to the pottage and the birthright was sharp practice, but had not in it the element of deceit.

Mankind is endowed with five senses, as we all know. One of the five was lacking with poor Isaac. *Sight* being gone, he was shut up to the other four, and this striking story shows that all the four were exercised. Rebekah's clever cookery presented the flesh of the kids as though it were venison, so Isaac's *taste* was deceived. Her production of Esau's garments and putting them on Jacob was effectual in deceiving his sense of *smell*. Her plan of covering Jacob's hands and neck with the hairy skin of the slain kids was equally successful in deceiving his powers of *touch*. One sense remained, that of *hearing*, and Isaac recognized the voice as that of Jacob. It was a case of three senses against one. Three senses declared that the son he could not see was Esau, and only one declared that it was Jacob. Isaac accepted the verdict of the majority and blessed the son he could not see.

*It is a solemn thought that Jacob got the earliest
recorded lesson in deceit from his mother*

Yet the majority verdict was wrong, and only the testimony of his ear was right. We see in this an allegory, illustrating a very important principle, namely that God-given faith comes by *hearing* (Romans 10:17).

Faith is not *sight*, as we know. But there are many who seem to think that faith comes by feeling, an error common not only among those who are desiring assurance of salvation, but also among those who are saved. Such would like to be guided by feelings or other natural senses rather than by simple faith in the word of God. We are living in an epoch in which God is addressing Himself, not to sight or feeling, but to the hearing of faith. We may safely trust His voice, even if all our natural senses contradict it.

The deceit in which Jacob was his mother's willing accomplice was reinforced by a direct lie on his part, when he declared that he was Esau (27:19). Fully deceived, Isaac blessed him. Verses 28 and 29 give the terms of this blessing, and we notice that it was all concerned with earthly advantage. He was to have plenty to eat and drink, and be served by his brethren and other nations, who would themselves be cursed or blessed by their attitude to him. There was no word as to God being his shield and reward, as we found with Abraham (15:1). Still, such as it was, it indicated the blessing on earth that was to be his. His descendants have forfeited it, as we know, but it will all be made good to them in the coming millennial day.

Our thoughts are now turned to Esau, who had been forestalled in this fraudulent manner. Yet, as is so often the case, man's evil is overruled to work out the purpose of God. The great trembling of Isaac (27:33) would seem to indicate that he was inwardly convicted of having tried to defeat God's purpose, and that, having failed in this, he had been used to pronounce on Jacob what he intended for Esau. The thing was irrevocable.

As for Esau, he at once recognized that here was the sequel to the wanton way in which he had sold his birthright (27:36). In regard to him we might summarize the whole sad story as "The birthright, the barter, and the bitter cry". The birthright was gone, and the bitter cry remained. In Hebrews 12:16,

*When people go to the length of despising God
and His blessing they perish*

Esau is designated “a profane person,” coupled with “fornicator.” The appropriateness of the connection is apparent when we remember that this latter sin is used figuratively for unholy connections between the believer and the world; whilst the “profane person” is one who lives wholly for this world, and shuts God and His world out of his thoughts. Esau had not only done this, but also had despised what was of God. When people go to the length of despising God and His blessing they perish, as is stated in Acts 13:41. In our day and in our land there are multitudes slipping into that great sin in regard to the gospel, and they stand on the brink of destruction.

Esau was now a pitiful sight. He wept (27:38). His tears could not undo the past or recover the birthright, but they did draw forth a blessing from Isaac, though not *the* blessing. And Isaac, in uttering what he did in verses 39 and 40, spoke doubtless as a prophet. For many a long century the yoke of Jacob has been off the neck of Esau. But the feud between the two brothers remains to this day, and is one of the greatest forces provoking discord in the earth. The beginning of it and the root of it – hatred – comes before us in verse 41. But again we see that in all his thoughts Esau had not God before him, otherwise he would not have imagined he could defeat God’s purpose by slaying his brother.

He miscalculated in thinking that his father’s death was impending (27:41), whereas it did not take place for a number of years. His threat however reached Rebekah’s ears and stirred her to a further plan on behalf of her favourite son (27:42ff). There was in it again, we think, an element of subterfuge. To explain to Isaac Jacob’s sudden departure for Haran, she complained of the annoying behaviour of the Hittite wives of Esau (which doubtless was quite true), and insinuated that Jacob might follow this bad example. Really, however, she only anticipated that Jacob’s stay with his uncle would last for “a few days” (27:44), and then, Esau’s anger having evaporated, she would have her favourite son back again.

The incident that fills this chapter relates some sordid details, but contains some searching instruction. We see how God maintains His purpose and at the same time exercises His disciplinary government. Everybody suffered; Esau and Isaac, and finally both Jacob and Rebekah, since the parting lasted for many years, rather than “a few days” as she anticipated.

Further, Jacob went forth to be deceived by others (30:25ff), and Rebekah was left to the unwelcome society of the daughters of Heth. She dwelt upon her weariness as a reason and an excuse for sending Jacob off to her brother (27:46), and the discord between them was doubtless very real; and she was left to face it without her favourite son.

That Isaac was satisfied with Rebekah's explanation is evident as we read the opening verses of chapter 28. Indeed at this point we see him in a much more favourable light, and speaking as a man of faith. He charges Jacob to go to Padan-aram and find a wife among his own people, and he blesses him in a way that surely indicates that he now accepted the purpose of God as to his two sons, a purpose that overruled and cancelled out his own natural inclinations. He calls upon God to give the blessing of Abraham to him, for that particular blessing – which carried with it the coming of the “Seed” in whom all nations should be blessed – was the very essence of the coveted birthright.

We notice further, that the possession of this blessing entailed the ultimate possession of the land of promise, in place of the patriarchs' present strangership in the midst of it. This has a remarkable voice for us, since we read in Galatians 3:14, of “the blessing of Abraham” coming “on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.” In receiving the Spirit we have the Pledge of the heavenly portion that is ours, but for the present we are left as strangers in the place where we are. Our portion lies there in the age to come. Our strangership is here in the age that is. Verses 6-9 are sadly illuminating as to the mind of Esau. He not only contracts a further marriage that was bound to displease his parents, but that also would contravene the purpose of God. In the previous chapter he appears as a prospective murderer: now he is again revealed as a deliberate and high-handed despiser of God and His word. We saw this contrary spirit characterizing him at the end of chapter 26; we now see it breaking out even more decisively and flagrantly, so that it is not difficult to understand the statement in the last Old-Testament book, “I hated Esau” (Malachi 1:3). As yet the history of Jacob has not furnished us with any clear reason why God should also say, “I loved Jacob” (Malachi 1:2).

A slightly edited version of an article in Scripture Truth 36 (1948-50), pp.221-224.

*Everybody suffered; Esau and Isaac,
and finally both Jacob and Rebekah*

It is time to wake up!

A word for today

David Anderson

“And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil its lusts” (Romans 13:11-14, NKJV).

What is the time?

With the words “And do this” (v.11), Paul gives another reason as to why his exhortations of 12:1 – 13:10 must be given serious consideration. Those Roman believers were to understand the time in which they lived, and wake up! In most earnest terms Paul explains why: their salvation (that is, their deliverance out of this world at the Lord’s return¹) was nearer than when they first believed. If that was true in 60 AD, then salvation must be imminent for us twenty-first century believers! And the word “now”, or “already” (Darby translation), conveys the supreme urgency for us to arouse from sleep. The imperative of the present is stressed for us in the narrowing of the three expressions of time in v.11: ²

1. “the time” – the present era during which the gospel is preached. It’s also the season during which our hope is the second coming of Christ.
2. “high time” is “now” – this very day, this very hour, this very minute.³ We must not delude ourselves into thinking that some future occasion will suffice for us to wake up from sleep. No, we must do it now – at once!
3. “nearer” is obvious – because we believed the gospel some time ago.

“Sleep”, in the context of v.11, is spiritual sleep, the state in which believers are totally absorbed into the world and unconcerned about the things of the Lord. It’s so easy for believers to sleep spiritually and to think that the Lord’s coming is a distant future (cp. Luke 12:45-48). Both the Lord and Paul recognised that

¹ See 1 Thessalonians 5:9.

² See W.E. Vine, “Romans”, reprinted in *The Collected Writings of W.E. Vine*, (Nashville, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996), Volume 1, p.421.

³ “that now is high time” is translated “that the hour has come” by ESV.

Now it is high time to awake out of sleep

it's an ever-present danger for Christian believers. So they both exhorted believers to watch, or stay awake. For example:⁴

- “Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming” (Matthew 24:42, ESV).
- “So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober” (1 Thessalonians 5:6, ESV).

Romans 13:12 considers the past, the present, and the future aspects of our lives:

- What's past – “The night is far gone” [ESV].
- What's future – “The day is at hand.”
- What we're to do in the present – “Cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light....”

“The night” is Paul's assessment of the time-period from the Lord's rejection until His appearing. His absence means that the world cannot benefit from the light of His presence. Believers should be aware of the present spiritual darkness and the spiritual forces of evil at work in our world (cp. Ephesians 6:12), throw off the works of darkness, and dress with the armour of light.

“The day” is the future and coming day of glory, when the Lord Jesus will reign in righteousness over this world; the time when He who rules “...rules justly over men, ruling in the fear of God, he dawns on them like the morning light, like the sun shining forth on a cloudless morning...” (2 Samuel 23:3-4, ESV). That “day”, says Paul, has drawn near⁵ – it is just about to happen! That is, Christ is coming for us – soon (cp. Revelation 22:20, ESV). Therefore, immediate resolve and corrective actions are demanded of us.

What must we do?

First, we are to wake up! (Romans 13:11) “Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God” (1 Corinthians 15:34, KJV).

⁴ Other references: Matt.25:13; Mark 13:34, 35, 37; Luke 12:37, 39; Acts 20:31; 1 Cor.16:13; Col.4:2; 1 Peter 5:8; Rev.3:2, 3 & 16:15.

⁵ K.S.Wuest, *Word Studies in the Greek New Testament, vol.1* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1975), p228.

We must cast off the works of darkness



We must put on the armour of light

Second, we must cast off the works of darkness (Romans 13:12) in the same way as we discard our bedclothes when morning arrives and it's time to get up and get on with the duties of the day. The works of darkness are listed in v.13. They described the social life in Rome in Paul's day and continue to be very much alive in today's pleasure-seeking society!

Third, in order that we might shine as lights in today's dark world, we must put on the armour of light (v.12). There is a spiritual battle going on for the hearts and minds of believers. To overcome this spiritual darkness, to go against the tide of evil, we must put on the armour of light (cp. Ephesians 6:10-18). The armour is so necessary in this ongoing spiritual battle, enabling us to "be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom [we] shine..." (Philippians 2:15, ESV).

Fourth, we must walk – that is, behave – as those who are in the light of the coming day of glory. We must live decent, honest, and righteous lives which befit those under the lordship of Christ.

“But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation

*We must “put on the Lord Jesus Christ,
and make no provision for the flesh,
to [gratify] its lusts”*

*It is impossible to turn
the clock of our lives backwards.
But we all can redeem the time*

through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him” (1 Thessalonians 5:4-10, ESV).

Finally, we must “put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to [gratify] its lusts” (Romans 13:14, NKJV). Ephesians 4:20-24 teaches that the latter action precedes the former:

“...you learned Christ – assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires [i.e., of the flesh], and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.” [ESV]

Galatians 5:24 states that, in principle, we crucified the flesh when we believed; and Romans 8:13 teaches that we make this a daily reality by the Holy Spirit’s power. In our passage here, Romans 13:14, Paul implores us not even to allow as much as a forethought for its lusts. Also, there is a real, practical, scriptural way of “putting on” the Lord Jesus Christ. Galatians 3:27 teaches that we “put Him on” when we were baptised unto Him. Romans 6:3-6 explains that our baptism signifies that our old lifestyle was crucified with Christ. Therefore we are to reckon ourselves as dead to sin, but alive to God in Him (v.11). This reasoning results in us offering ourselves to the service of God, and using our bodies as instruments, or weapons⁶ of righteousness.

Final thought

I wrote this article on Friday 23 October 2020 at the start of the weekend in which the clocks go back one hour in order to end British Summer Time. For believers, it is impossible to turn the clock of our lives backwards. But we all can wake up out of spiritual sleep and redeem [buy back] the time. See Ephesians 5:8-17, where Paul’s exhortations are much like these in Romans 13:11-14.

⁶ The majority of translations of Romans 6:13 use “instruments” but it is the same Greek word as “weapons” in Romans 13:12. In all other uses of the word, it’s translated “weapons” (John 18:3; 2 Corinthians 6:7 & 10:4).

“The time is near”

The first three verses of the book of Revelation

T. Balderston

The first three verses of the book of Revelation already tell us a great deal about the book.

1:1. “The Revelation of Jesus Christ” means that the Lord Jesus is the Possessor of this true “revelation”, or “unveiling” of things to come, in contrast to the many pseudo-revelations then circulating. These falsely claimed to report what God had revealed to long-dead figures of Israel’s history – Enoch, Baruch, Ezra, etc. As guarantee of the authenticity of the Revelation, John gives the name “Jesus Christ”, the name by which the disciples had known God Incarnate in this world. Compare the matching verse at the end of the book – 22:16.

“...things which must shortly take place” (NKJV). It has been frequently noted that the wording of the Greek of “things which must... take place” in the Septuagint of Daniel 2:28 is identical with John’s wording here. The difference is that John replaces Daniel’s “at the end of the days” (NKJV: “in the latter days”) with the adverbial phrase, *en tachei*, translated “shortly” in the NKJV. This is an important point. John is signalling to his readers that the culmination of God’s purposes regarding the world and its empires, which had still been remote in Daniel’s time, was now near at hand .

However many evangelical scholars wish to take this further, and in effect, interpret the phrase to refer to things already happening. This is an expression of their doctrine of “realised eschatology.” They believe that the entire book of Revelation concerns the present gospel-age. In so reinterpreting the phrase conventionally translated as “things which must shortly take place” these scholars

- interpret the *en tachei* as meaning “speedily”. This is a possible, perhaps even preferable, re-translation, in this writer’s view.
- interpret the “must” as referring to the inexorable fulfilment of the divine purpose. This is an unexceptionable interpretation, as it is clearly its meaning in Daniel 2:28.
- interpret the verb translated “take place” as referring to the present. This conflicts with the meaning of the similar verb in Daniel 2:28, Septuagint, where clearly a future sense is intended, since the events in question will take place “at the end of the days”.

*“The Revelation of Jesus Christ” is written
to all believers living from John’s time
till the Lord comes for them*

Thus these scholars read the phrase in Revelation 1:1 to mean, “the things which are speedily taking place.”

However, if the phrase refers to what was already happening as John wrote and would continue to happen throughout the long “gospel era”, then the “speedily” runs into difficulties. The reformed scholar G.K. Beale wishes to have it all ways, and to interpret the “*en tachei*” as meaning what will start happening very soon – and indeed might already be happening – but also to refer to “its ongoing aspect, not on nearness of consummated fulfilment, though the latter is secondarily in mind as leading from the former.”¹ It is hard to see how so much complex meaning can be wrested out of the little phrase “*en tachei*”.

Perhaps Professor Beale wished to allow for the possibility that maybe the “things” of Revelation 1:1 actually commenced a few years after John completed his book – but no later. In that case, and seeing that the breaking of these seals triggers judgment on the earth, Beale should be able to point to examples of these judgments. He doesn’t. Rather, the parallelism between 1:3 and 22:7 shows that “the Revelation of Jesus Christ” is written to all believers living from John’s time till the Lord comes for them. During that whole period the “things” of Revelation 1:1 remain “about to happen speedily”.

This is the view taken in this article. In any case, the matter is settled by the phrase in verse 3, “the time is near”. See further on verse 3 below.

“His servant John...” Which “John”? “The disciple whom Jesus loved” lived to a very good old age – and he wrote of the fourth Gospel (John 21:23, 24). He was, I assume, the disciple John. Therefore it seems unlikely that another “John” writing an “apocalypse” would sign himself simply as “John”, without adding anything to distinguish himself from the apostle. Even if the apostle John had recently died, this would surely still have been the case. The simple

¹ G.K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, and Cambridge, UK, 1999) p.182. Similarly, Michael Wilcock, *The Message of Revelation* [I Saw Heaven opened]. *The Bible Speaks Today* (London, IVP, 1975, 1989), pp.32f.

*Different styles
are no argument against common authorship*

name “John”, then, to my mind means that the writer of Revelation was indeed John the apostle. If the work had been an imposture, surely someone in the seven churches would have spotted it. If the whole scheme of letters to the seven churches was itself phoney, there would have been memories in these churches to spot this.

Against this argument, however, can be fielded the sharply different writing styles of John’s Gospel and First Epistle, and the Revelation. But people can change their writing style for specific purposes. If we compare the style of “James” or “Bill M.” in J.N. Darby’s *Familiar Conversations on Romanism* we find a style entirely different from his normal.² Even the “N*” of these conversations speaks with a strikingly more perspicuous style than Darby’s habitual – and often hastily composed – prose. It is perfectly possible that John saw fit, under God, to express the exalted truths of his Gospel in a very simple sentence structure. Therefore the markedly different styles of the two books are no argument against common authorship. There are many common features in both books to indicate common authorship.

John was the disciple to whom the Lord’s deepest secrets were disclosed – as his entire Gospel bears witness. It would be appropriate, then, if the most extensive disclosure of “things to come” were also made to this same disciple – a great “unveiling” indeed, even if not to be put on a par with that of the Gospel.

“He signified it by his angel.” John interacts with many angels in the course of the book, but this angel seems to be one otherwise unmentioned, through whom the Lord communicated the entire Revelation to John.

1:2. John, in turn, faithfully reproduced on papyrus all that he had heard and seen. He did not, as many commentators suppose, ransack the Old Testament and the Jewish writings, including other apocalypses, for ideas to write about and wordings to clothe these ideas in. Verse 1 told us that the book comes entirely from Jesus Christ, as He Himself had received it from God. There is, in fact, no other book of the New Testament that lays so direct a claim to

² See, e.g., his *Collected Writings vol.12.*, p. 276 Stow Hill edition or 420, Morrish edition; or vol.31, p. 5, Stow Hill edition.

*No other book of the New Testament
lays so direct a claim to inspiration as this one*

inspiration as this one. There is something special about a book largely consisting of words and visions so conspicuously flagged as directly God-given. Of course the Spirit of God can have made many allusions to the OT that help readers to understand the book. But this is different from John having laboriously assembled them.

1:3. There is a special blessing on persons who disseminate, and persons who listen to, the words of this prophecy (the blessing also being implicitly on these persons’ rejection of the other, “phoney” apocalypses).

But instead of this special blessing making Revelation a favourite “read” among Christians, it has tended to be neglected throughout Christian history, and particularly these last forty or fifty years. Some might justify their neglect of the book by the difficulty of understanding it. But God left it for our learning. Whatever the reason, many believers have in recent decades been robbed of the blessing promised to those who read it.

The blessing that reading and “keeping” the book impart is specially because “the time is near”.

In the New Testament the word translated “near” can be used (as also in English) in either a spatial (e.g., Luke 19:11), or a temporal sense (e.g., Matthew 24:32). Used in a temporal sense (and just as in English) it does *not* mean “the time now present”, and never means that the person or thing is already present and visible, but that they are very close to being present and visible. This simple observation rules out the “realised eschatology” interpretation of the book, already mentioned in connexion with verse 1. As already said, since the addressees are all who treasure the book until the Lord comes again (Revelation 1:3, 22:7), what it describes remains “near” and not present until He comes.

And now to conclude with a fuller look at the “realised-eschatological”, or, “idealist” interpretation. It is summarised in the ESV Study Bible thus:

“the forces and conflicts in Revelation’s vision cycles manifest themselves in events that were to occur ‘soon’ from the perspective of the first-century churches (as preterists maintain), but that they also find expression in the church’s ongoing struggle of persevering faith in the present, and foretell a

This level of martyrdom was not experienced during the first three centuries of the Christian era

still-future escalation of persecution and divine wrath, leading to the return of Christ...”³

(“Preterists” are persons who maintain that the entire substance of Revelation was fulfilled during the first century.) We ought to ask, “How does this interpretation of Revelation chapters 6ff match the historical record?”

Let us focus on one key aspect of the prophecy. The picture conveyed by Revelation chapters 7 – 18 is that, in the epoch that these chapters describe, (and aside from the 144 thousand of chapter 7) all God’s people will be suffering persecution, and most, to say the least, will be martyred. The only participants in the first resurrection, from the standpoint of John’s Revelation, will be martyrs (20:4,5).⁴ But this level of martyrdom was not experienced during the first three centuries of the Christian era. All Christians were at all times rendering themselves liable to execution by not participating in worship of the emperor. But actual executions were far fewer. Chapters 17 – 22 of *The Cambridge History of Christianity, volume 1: Origins to Constantine*⁵ offer concise regional histories of the church in that era. All of them paint a picture of churches liable at any time to savage persecution, but usually not experiencing it. The eminent W.H. Friend’s chapter on persecutions in the same volume conspicuously refrains from the least indication of numbers or proportions of Christians martyred. In short, the experience of martyrdom was that portrayed in the seven letters of Revelation chapters 2 & 3. Smyrna was about to experience it; Pergamum had just experienced it; for the other five it was not on the horizon.

³ *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, Ill, Crossway, 2008), p. 2457. “Preterists” are those who maintain that the entire substance of Revelation was fulfilled during the first century.

⁴ “Amillennialists” – those who treat the millennium as happening now – explain this verse as referring to the “risen-ness” of believers now (cp. Colossians 3:1). See, e.g., Wilcox, p. 192. The violence of the verb “beheaded” in the verse rules out this interpretation. Nor does 20:5 admit of the interpretation of v.4 as meaning that a high proportion of the resurrected had been martyrs. 20:4 can be reconciled with John 5:28f on the likely supposition that 20:4 refers only to the second part of “the first resurrection” and not to the “rapture”.

⁵ Eds., Margaret M. Mitchell and Frances M. Young (Cambridge, C.U.P, 2006).

The “realised-eschatological” interpretation of Revelation entirely neglects the “age of Christendom”

See also the Wikipedia articles on “The Diocletianic Persecutions” and on “Persecutions of Christians in the Roman empire”. Persecution was nothing like on the scale portrayed in Revelation chapters 7:9ff; 12:17; 13:7-10.

This conclusion is corroborated by Tertullian’s interpretation of “What / he who restrains” in 2 Thessalonians 2:6,7. This church father, whose lived c.155 – 220 AD, wrote regarding the identity of this “restrainer”, “Who other, if not the Roman state?”⁶ Tertullian was well aware of the fact of persecution, which, he held, strengthened the church. But he also held that the Roman empire was the “restraint” that held back the advent of anti-Christ. He could, therefore, imagine far worse persecution.

And the “realised-eschatological” (sometimes called “idealist”) interpretation of Revelation 6 – 18, as spelt out above, entirely neglects the fact that the “age of persecution” was succeeded by the “age of Christendom”. In that epoch, which in “the West” lasted from the fourth to the end of the twentieth century AD, the state privileged the professing church, which in return sought to instil loyalty to the current regime among the populace. Throughout this epoch the rate of martyrdom was low. Waldensians, Hussites, and Lollards were certainly persecuted, and many burned at the stake. However only a small proportion of the membership of these sects was executed.⁷ And if we suppose that Bernard of Clairvaux (original author of “Jesus, the very thought of Thee,” and the most powerful cleric of his age) was a real believer, we must conclude that, even if only a small minority, there must also have been many thousands of medieval Roman Catholics who were really saved – but not persecuted.

As regards the English reformation, there cannot be more than a few hundred protestant martyrs recorded in John Foxe’s celebrated “Book of Martyrs” (for whose accuracy present-day Tudor historians have high regard), yet there must have been tens of thousands of English protestant believers. And the lives of

⁶ See George Milligan, *St Paul’s Epistles to the Thessalonians* (London. Macmillan, 1904), p.101.

⁷ So much can be deduced from Malcolm Lambert, *Medieval Heresy. Popular Movements from the Gregorian Reform to the Reformation* (Oxford, Blackwell, 3rd edn., 2002).

both Jews and Christians were generally protected in Islamic countries too. Including martyrdoms outside Christendom, especially in the new mission fields of the nineteenth century, would no doubt increase the estimated proportion of believers martyred, but to nothing like the proportion suggested by Revelation chapters 7 – 18. No doubt Revelation chapters 7 -18 are poetically expressed and not to be read as one would the UK’s decennial censuses. Nonetheless these chapters would be very misleading if they were intended to characterise global Christian experience from the first century to date.

None of this is intended to belittle the faith and the sufferings of the many believers who have suffered persecution and martyrdom. Persecution of Christians is historically high at the present time, and rising, and the fear of martyrdom must be horrific, e.g., in the Sahel. But the only way Revelation chapters 7 – 16 could be about Christian history to date would be if God were only interested in martyrs. However chapters 2 & 3 demonstrate that this is not so. If there were to be any fulfilment of these chapters during this present “gospel age,” it must still be to come.

The word “speedily” or “quickly”, and “near” that occur in Revelation 1:1,3 occur again in Revelation 16:15 and 22:7, 10, 12, and 20. Revelation 16:15, is, in this writer’s view, a parenthetical reassurance from the Lord Himself that the reader is not going to have await the dreadful outpourings of divine wrath described in the book, from first seal to seventh bowl, but, rather, should expect the Lord’s coming for him at any time. Revelation 22:7, 12 & 20 likewise speak of the imminence of the Lord’s coming. This being so, in my view the occurrences of “shortly / speedily” and “near” in both Revelation 1:1,3 and 22:10 mean that the judgments and persecutions described in the book from chapter 6 on will start contemporaneously with the Lord’s coming for “His own”, another event that is always “near”, or “speedy”. This is often called the “dispensational futurist” interpretation of Revelation, and it is corroborated by Revelation 1:19 together with 4:1.

*The judgments and persecutions
described in the book
will start with the Lord’s coming for “His own”*

Paul's neglected letter

New creation: Galatians 3:15 – 25

T. Balderston

Continuing a series that began in January.

Not long (it seems) after Paul had evangelised the Galatians, certain Jews, professing faith in Jesus, had gained the ear of his converts and were persuading them that they needed to be circumcised in order to be saved (Galatians 5:2).

The issue therefore cast in doubt the truth of the gospel. These interlopers evidently also claimed that what Paul was preaching seriously misrepresented the “gospel” which the twelve apostles had sent him out to proclaim. Not so, says Paul, and in any case he had not received his commission from the twelve at all, but direct from the ascended, glorified, Son of God (see 1:11-23).

Paul ought not to have had to defend “his” gospel to his Galatians converts: their own conversion experience should have made it clear to them (3:1-4). However, the fact that he did still have to defend it forced him to write it out, and so leave for us too a record of the basis of the gospel by which we are saved. Nearly 1500 years later this was of incalculable benefit to Luther as he agonised over the question, “What must I do to be saved?” Galatians and Romans liberated him from the error with which Roman Catholicism had overlaid “the gospel of our salvation”. Well-meaning men and women are constantly trying to weaken the simple gospel of our salvation by faith alone, and so, as long as believers are left in this world, we will need these two foundational Letters by Paul.

In 3:6ff: Paul demonstrated to the Galatians that even what we call the Old-Testament Scriptures – the Scriptures which the Judaizers were doubtless trying to conscript to their cause – declared that Abraham’s simple faith in what God had said was the basis on which God accounted him righteous. He

*Well-meaning men and women are constantly trying
to weaken the gospel of salvation by faith alone;
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we will need Galatians*

“He who through faith is righteous, shall live”

“believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness” (Genesis 15:6). This “accounting of righteousness” to Abraham was what made him acceptable to God and delivered him from judgment. It was therefore a “gospel of salvation”. People with this faith are “sons of Abraham” (Galatians 3:6,7). Genesis itself spelt this out in promising blessing even to gentiles who have faith (Galatians 3:8,9).

Other texts in the Old Testament demonstrate that, even for the Israelite, justification had to be *by faith alone* (vv.10-14). The previous article in this series¹ sought to tease out Paul’s argument in these verses, namely, that the Law that God had given on Sinai *could not save*, but that God had said to the Israelite prophet Habakkuk, “the just shall live by faith”, (or “He who through faith is righteous, shall live”) (Habakkuk 2:4). A remarkable text in Deuteronomy 21:23 (that Paul quotes in Galatians 3:13) tells how our sinless Lord incurred the curse of the Law through His crucifixion, thus freeing believing Jews from it, with the result that believing gentiles, too, might receive the same blessing as Abraham – justification by faith.² (The context suggests that in 3:14 the “we” who “receive the promise of the Spirit through faith” are both Jewish and gentile believers.³)

Therefore seeking circumcision denied the only way of salvation – justification by faith. But now Paul adds another further weighty reason for vehemently opposing circumcision.

The issue evidently centred on the identity of “the seed of Abraham” (see Genesis 12:7). It seems from 3:15-16 that, whilst the Judaizers recognised Christ as the primary “Seed” and Inheritor of the Abrahamic blessings (see Note at end), they limited those who were truly saved through Him to circumcised believers. Absolutely not, said Paul (3:16-18). In ordinary life, what someone has solemnly covenanted to do cannot rightly be restricted by conditions first stipulated at a later date. So also with God: the terms of the blessing promised to Abraham purely on the basis of his faith that there would be an heir (cp. Genesis 15:2-6) cannot be restricted by a Law only given

¹ See *Scripture Truth*, July 2021, pp.292ff.

² An alternative view would be that the “blessing” is that of Gen.12:2-3.

³ So almost all commentaries that I consulted.

centuries later. Indeed, Paul says, a blessing made good in return for law-keeping cannot be considered a promise at all, but is rather a reward for service rendered i.e., as a “work” (3:18). Christ was the “Seed” envisioned in Genesis 12:7, etc., and all who are “of faith” (Galatians 3:9) are “seed of Abraham” – *in Christ* (3:29).

This “put-down” of the Judaizers by Paul would surely raise another question in the minds of his possibly incredulous readers. Why was the Law given at all if it did not open the door to the Abrahamic blessings? (3:19). Paul must now pause to deal with this objection (3:19-25).

His answer is that the Law was introduced “because of transgressions.” The simple understanding of this would be that it was introduced to prevent Israel from falling into the grosser depravities of the gentiles, until the time was right for Messiah to come. Greek boys of wealthy families were “minded” by a paidagōgos [ESV, “guardian”], a slave assigned to the task of keeping them out of harm and mischief till they were old enough to look after themselves. That, says Paul, is a good analogy for the purpose of the Law. There was a right time for Messiah to come – the “fulness of time” (4:4), and the Law plugged the gap between the time of the call of Israel out of Egypt and that right time for Messiah to come. *That* was the “age of Law”; but *the gospel*, we might say, introduced the “age of faith” and the “of the Spirit” (see 3:23, 25; 4:6).

Maybe Paul implies something extra when he says that the Law was introduced “because of *transgressions*.” Why did he not write, “because of *sins*”? Notice that in Romans 4:15 Paul wrote, “where there is no law, there is no transgression.” And in Romans 7:9 he wrote, “I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.” The Law alerted Paul to just how abhorrent to *God* sin was, and to the reality of the judgment that transgression would bring him – Paul – into. This side of the matter is developed in Romans, but in the phrase “because of transgressions” there may be a hint of it here too. Not only did the Law keep Israel from the grosser sins until Messiah came, but it also, by turning their wrongdoings into *transgressions*, it should have alerted them to their condemnation in the sight

*Why was the Law given at all if it did not
open the door to the Abrahamic blessings?*

of a holy God. (This was what might be called the “dispensational” function of the Law.)

Having dealt with this matter of the reason for the Law Paul can return to the matter of “the seed of Abraham”. God views all believers as “in Christ,” because we have been “baptised unto Christ” and as having “put on Christ”. Therefore, He views us as he views Christ as Man, so that if Christ is Abraham’s Seed, we too are Abraham’s seed. The claim of the circumcisionists is nullified.

But to understand Paul’s answer more fully we must ask why he makes *baptism*, not just *conversion*, the hinge of his argument in 3:27-29. He does this because baptism signifies the believer’s being dead and risen with Christ (Romans 6:3-4). Note that in the first century, when Christians formed “a sect everywhere spoken against” (Acts 28:22), true faith could be ascribed to all the baptised adults Paul was writing to. So he could in effect ask them:

“Do you not know what your baptism meant? What does a man confess when he is baptised? That he belongs to a Saviour who died and rose again. ‘So many of us as were baptised unto Jesus Christ (says our apostle elsewhere) were baptised unto *His death*.’ And the death of Christ is that which for ever dissolves even a Jew’s connexion with the law. ...”⁴

That is to say, by believing in Christ, we are counted by God as “in Him.” But Paul goes further. The state of being “in Christ” is our identity and our relationship with every other believer. Paul says (3:28), that “in Christ” “there is no Jew nor Greek, there is no bondservant nor freeman, there is no male and female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus”⁵ (3:28, Kelly). By being identified with the death and the resurrection of Christ, each believer sheds, so to speak, what in this life distinguishes him or her from other believers, so that only what unites them in Christ remains. To define our relationship with others by circumcision defines it by something other than the cross and the resurrection of Christ. It would define that relationship by something that belongs to an old-creation order. But our salvation through Christ bring us into another, new-creation order, *because Christ is crucified and risen from the dead*.

Only the first phrase of 3:28 – “There is no Jew nor Greek” – was strictly needed to make Paul’s point here. But he also added, “there is no bondservant nor freeman, there is no male and female.” He did this in order to emphasise the total “newness” of the new creation. This is strikingly confirmed by the

⁴ W. Kelly, *Lectures on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians. With a New Translation* (London, Morrish, c.1865), p.83 [on Galatians 3:27].

⁵ Kelly’s translation: *Lectures...* p. vii. But Motyer thinks there is an intended incongruity – to underline supernatural magnetism (p. 54).

*The state of being “in Christ” is our identity
and our relationship with every other believer*

form in which he expresses the third of his binary distinctions. The first two are of the form “no... nor.” But the third is of the form “no... and”: “no male and female”. (Almost all translations ignore this vital difference.) Paul changed his wording in his third “division” of mankind in order to make the phrase echo Genesis 1:27: “male and female created He them”. Even the most elementary distinction in the old creation – that between man and woman – is done away in the new! Compare Matthew 22:30, etc.

Statements parallel to Galatians 3:28 can be found in 1 Corinthians 12:13 and Colossians 3:11. In these other two the divisions between the various nations, and between bond and free are similarly mentioned as having been done away in Christ. But not the third, the distinction between man and woman. The reason is obvious. In Colossians Paul was, only seven verses later, going to pronounce on the reciprocal and different duties of men and women (3:18,19). He could have explained that the obliteration of the gender difference belonged in its fulness only to the time after actual resurrection; but it was simpler not to introduce this complication at all. Likewise, in First Corinthians, Paul had just required difference of dress code between men and women when praying and prophesying, and was about to require silence of the women in the assemblies (11:4,5; 14:34f). These two texts do not mean that “not male and female” has no relevance today, but that its relevance is nuanced by the fact that we are still in our “old-creation” bodies, where Genesis 1:27 still applies. But here in Galatians Paul *includes* “not male and female” in order to burn into his readers’ minds, so to speak, the wrongness of the “old-creation” presupposition of the Judaizers’ demand that Paul’s converts be circumcised. “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Paul, therefore, has given two reasons in Galatians 3 why the circumcisionists’ demand were wrong – so wrong, that the circumcisionist should be “accursed” (1:8f). The first was, that it negated justification by faith alone. The second was, that it defined believers by a relationship other than their being “in Christ”, and hence also denied the truth that believers belong to the new creation that has been brought about by Christ’s death and resurrection,. He sums his point up at the close of his epistle with the words, “In Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but new creation” (6:15).

“In Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but new creation”

One loose end remains to be tied up. If Galatians were all that survived of Paul's Letters we would infer from his “not Jew or Greek” in 3:28 that Israel has no place in the future counsels of God, and that only Christians are in any sense “seed” of Abraham. This is what the vast numbers of “supersessionist” Christians believe. They hold that God's promises of old to Israel have “morphed” into promises to the church. Paul didn't agree with them. In Romans chapters 9 – 11 he agonised over Israel's rejection of the gospel and deduced from the character of the God whose “gifts and calling are irrevocable” (Romans 11:29, ESV), that there is a sense in which Israel *is* still “the seed of Abraham” (11:1); and that the promises made to Israel in the Old Testament will certainly be fulfilled to Israel. This is because God must be faithful to His promises (2 Timothy 2:13). Making promises to a people constituted in one way, and redeeming them to another people constituted very differently, is not faithfulness! However the exposition in this article implies that these promises will be fulfilled to a repentant but unresurrected Israel, in the millennium. There is no space here to further develop this topic.



Note on “seed”. I have read that in ancient Greek as in modern English, “seed” [*sperma*] can be used as a collective singular. Elsewhere Paul adopts the collective meaning of “seed” – Romans 4:16, 18. But this collective singular is not how Paul meant “seed” to be understood in Galatians, and he must have expected his interpretation of Genesis 12:7, etc., to seem perfectly reasonable to his readers. He means “seed singular”, and the plural of it to be “seeds”. Paul's point here does not flow from the Greek text of Genesis (Septuagint) as such, for in Genesis the word “seed” only ever appears in the singular (except perhaps in 47:19, 23,24). And clearly Gen. 15:13 must be understood as a collective singular. Rather he must be asserting that in relation to the promises to Abraham, “seed” must be understood as indeed a singular, and to refer to Christ. Not even the Judaizers could deny that God's promises are only fulfilled because of Christ. What the Judaizers overlooked, however, was that all believers are “in Christ”, and that hence all of them share even now in its post-resurrection, new-creation, character.

The NKJV's translation of “seed” in Genesis as “descendants” is unhelpful; the ESV's “offspring” is better.

The Lord's Supper

leading to Worship

by F. A. Hughes

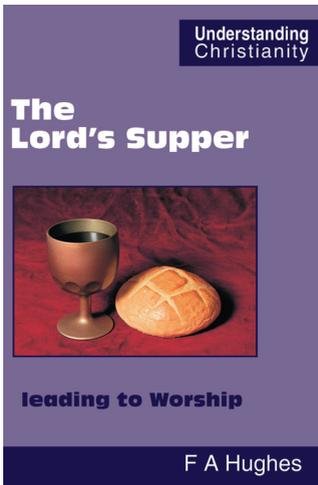
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Do not delay to send in your order for this new devotional study of a theme so central to Christianity. The theme — the Lord's Supper — is set in a very wide context of Scripture Truth. The author's purpose in writing this book is clear in the closing words:



“It is therefore our earnest prayer and appeal that all who read this book may be challenged by the Lord, and awakened in their affections towards Him. May we also help in true spiritual energy to encourage the revival of this precious observance of breaking bread wherever possible — even by the twos or threes or “from house to house” — in obedience to our Lord’s loving request to His own, and so show forth His death until He comes.”

So read the advertisement for the first edition back in *Scripture Truth*, Volume 44, Number 16, July-August 1973!

Out of print for several years, we are pleased to make a brand new edition of this valuable publication available. We’ve tracked down the sources of quotations from other authors [“one in a certain place says”], adding them as footnotes, checked the Scripture references and added the references for quoted texts without them.

The Foreword explains the reason for its writing:

“This book has been written because of a burden shared by a few lovers of Christ about the importance, relevance, meaning and infinite privilege and joy of observing the Lord’s Supper.”

In thirteen short chapters the author explores these and other aspects of his subject, all the time quoting Scriptures to encourage and challenge the reader to consider seriously the part the Lord’s Supper plays in their own Christian experience.

“Abide in me”

Christian, would you *fruitful* be?
Jesus says, “Abide in me”!
From Him all your fruit is found
— may it to God’s praise abound.

Christian, would you *happy* be?
Jesus says, “Abide in me”!
He is your exceeding joy,
blessings should your lips employ.

Christian, would you *holy* be?
Jesus says, “Abide in me”!
Sanctified in every part?
— sanctify Him in your heart.

Christian, this your motto be:
“Jesus says, ‘Abide in me’”;
grace and strength from Him receive;
as a branch in Jesus live.

Soon you will your Master see,
hear Him say, “Abide with me
in my Father’s house above,
in the bosom of His love.”

James George Deck (1802-84), slightly updated.