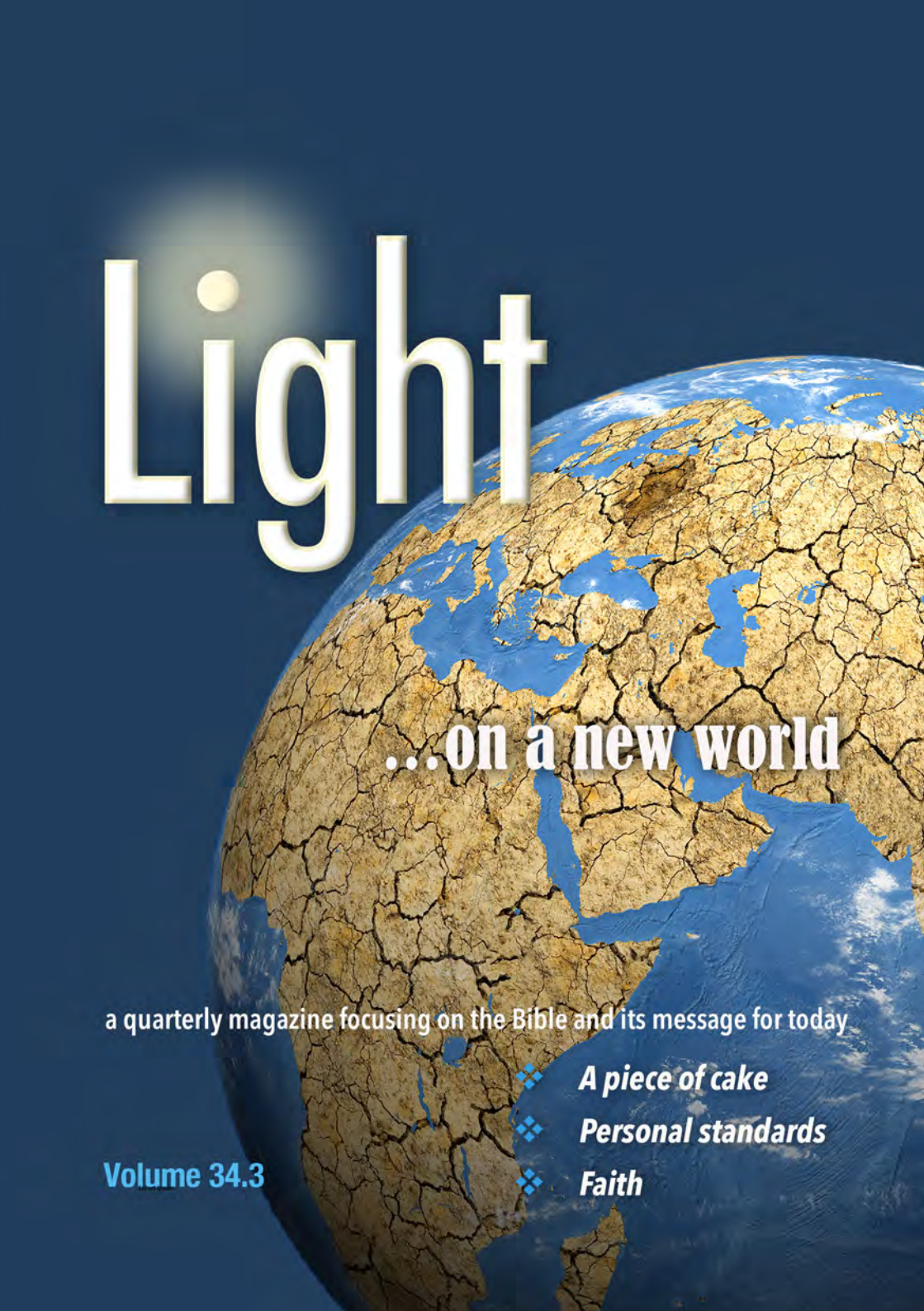


Light



...on a new world

a quarterly magazine focusing on the Bible and its message for today

Volume 34.3

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cover picture

An artist depicts our planet parched by heat. Recent months have seen the highest temperatures ever recorded over much of the world, with lakes and rivers drying up and wild fires causing devastation. Does mankind have the ability to solve these unprecedented problems?

See article 'Signs of the Times' on page 21.

LIGHT BIBLE PUBLICATIONS

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A PIECE OF CAKE!

I expect you have heard the expression.

If something is delightfully easy and pleasurable and poses no problems at all, it's 'a piece of cake'. Not that baking a cake is easy, far from it, but consuming it is, although of course you can have too much of a good thing!

In a recent book that explores some of the weaknesses of current evolutionary theory (see Editor's note on page 8), the writer uses the analogy of a cake recipe to explain some of the problems. Most people are now familiar with the role of DNA in each of our cells as a sort of coded recipe for each of us as individuals. The current theory of evolution depends on accidental changes in that DNA recipe over very long periods of time. Laurie Broughton writes this:

THE COOKERY BOOK

'The DNA in each of the 30,000,000,000,000 cells in your body can be likened to a very large cookery book. A comprehensive cookery book might run to, say, 600 pages, and this would typically contain around two million letters.



Let's imagine that we had most of the recipes in the world in it, and it was about 1,500 times bigger. In that case the DNA in every one of our cells would be like this much bigger book, each cell containing the equivalent of about three billion letters.

Why choose a cookery book for our analogy?

The simple reason is that just as a cookery book specifies recipes for making things, and just as we need to follow a series of instructions to make those things, so does our DNA. A cookery recipe is a fairly precise set of instructions, each one intended to produce a single item, and in this sense a single recipe in the book is very roughly analogous to one of our genes.

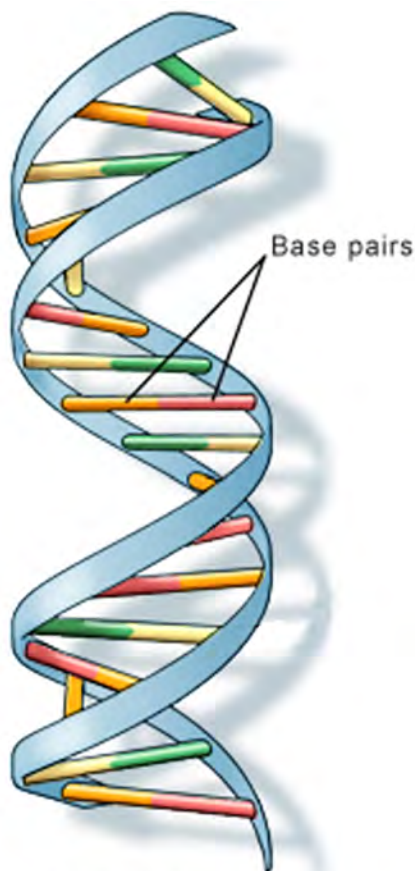
So, to illustrate the problem for evolution, let's play a mind game. Let's imagine that we have a recipe for a lemon cake, but the family prefers a fruit cake. Let's assume that we only have one recipe for a cake, which just happens to be a lemon cake. The question is: how many letters would one have to change in order to convert a recipe for that lemon cake into one for a fruit cake?

Now like all games we have rules, and the first one is that we have to change letters in our recipe randomly. The second rule is that the letters we replace on the page in the recipe must also be randomly picked. We cannot choose them. The third rule is that we are only allowed to change one, or at the very most two letters at a time, but the fourth rule is that every change we make must produce a better recipe, otherwise we throw that change away and start again (that is essentially what the evolutionary term 'natural selection' implies) – only changes which confer some advantage will be selected and kept).

Can you see that ever producing a better recipe? How many tries would we need, and how long would it take? How quickly would we get to a brand

new, useful recipe, even if it wasn't specifically for a fruit cake? You may take my assurance that even if you had a million tries a second, you wouldn't get anything sensible, or edible, even if you worked for literally thousands of times the existence of our universe (which is believed to be many billions of years old).

Now, a single change or 'mutation' in the DNA is very much like a change in a single letter in our bigger cookery



book. But how much DNA would one have to change so that the instructions still produced something useful to the cell? We are now learning that a huge amount would have to change, just as in a book.

Mutations occur when either chemicals or high energy radiation manage to attack the DNA. But two points should be made clear here. The first is that mutations in DNA usually only affect the equivalent of single letters, and only very rarely two together. So, in our cookery book analogy we are usually limited to changing an absolute maximum of two letters at a time. Secondly, the problem is that to make any significant change in the DNA, many mutations are needed, and they must all happen together.

MUTATIONS

It's worth thinking about how these changes, if they occur, could eventually produce a new living thing.

LEFT: The DNA double spiral. The 'base pairs' shown are the chemical 'letters' on each 'rung' of the ladder. 'The order of these letters determines the information available ...similar to the way letters of the alphabet appear in a certain order to form words and sentences.' (medlineplus.gov)

These changes would have to be made either in the new single cell from which the organism grows, or extremely early in the life of that organism while it was in the earliest stage of development. Otherwise, new features are not going to appear. It's rather like making changes to the design of a car. If the designer waits until the car has been built, he has the problem of half pulling the thing apart in order to make the necessary changes. No car designer will do this. He will redesign the vehicle, and then build it.

In a similar way, mutations that occur in the mature organism are not going to be much help to that particular living thing. A mutation in one cell out of millions isn't going to change a whole organism very much, certainly not sufficiently to give it any advantage in life. The mutation, if it is going to take hold, must affect the cells which will produce the next generation. But here we run into another, even more severe problem.

We now know that the developing organism, particularly in the early stages of growth, is extremely sensitive to changes in its DNA. As an example, although we may not be aware of the fact, this almost certainly is the reason for many

spontaneous miscarriages, and may explain why some women fail to conceive. Either the egg of the woman, or the sperm of the man, has one or more genetic defects, and the woman's body somehow, and quite remarkably, detects this, and the foetus or embryo is rejected. It is now generally accepted that even relatively minor changes in the DNA are fatal to young organisms.

So, we are presented with a double problem. Changes in the adult life of an organism won't make it any better, and changes made early in an organism's life will all too often kill it. And while a few mutations are not lethal, we do not know of a single truly advantageous mutation.

ERROR CORRECTION

One of the interesting points here is how both we and the DNA deal with mistakes or errors. Mistakes can occur when cells divide and the DNA is copied. New cells are produced as we grow and when we are injured and repairs are needed.

In our analogy of the cookery book, when we scan a page, we can pick out spelling mistakes. If we see one, indeed if we see many, we can probably still make sense of the instructions. We would mentally

RIGHT 'Mrs Beeton's' (1861) the original and most famous cookery book of all. Can you imagine spelling mistakes and printing errors ever producing a new or improved recipe in a cookery book like this?

correct the mistakes in our heads. And, amazingly, this is what happens physically to the DNA. If mistakes are detected, there is cell 'machinery' to correct them.

This illustrates another problem with mutations. If the DNA gets changed, the error-correcting systems of the cell almost always jump on it and return it to its pristine state. But what if a change does not get corrected? These changes are the mutations, and mutations are not only very rare, but good mutations, those that might improve things, appear to be non-existent. Well over 99% of mutations are now known to be harmful. We do not know of a single beneficial mutation which increases the information in the DNA. When challenged, Richard Dawkins was unable to give a single example where information had been increased.

It had been thought for many years that errors in DNA, mainly due to faulty copying, could explain how new information became part of the DNA, but that idea has now been



machinery in the cell can usually sort them out. But to make an effective change, many simultaneous mutations are needed. In cells an absolute maximum of three changes are likely to occur to a particular area of the DNA at any one time. In our analogy, it is like only two to three simultaneous letter changes ever happening in one

paragraph. Clearly this isn't anywhere near enough to make a new recipe in our book, and neither are a few mutations in the DNA anywhere near enough to produce a new and useful feature. All organisms have large amounts of DNA, so the argument applies across the board.

abandoned. Biologists meeting in Salzburg in 2018 recognised that errors cannot explain genetic novelty and complexity, so other effects are now being proposed. Unfortunately, they all run up against the basic problem: chance spontaneous generation of new information never happens. Like copying errors, they also will have to be abandoned in their turn.

MANY CHANGES NEEDED ALL AT THE SAME TIME

If they happen at all, the vast majority of mutations happen singly, which is why the error-correcting

machinery in the cell can usually sort them out. But to make an effective change, many simultaneous mutations are needed. In cells an absolute maximum of three changes are likely to occur to a particular area of the DNA at any one time. In our analogy, it is like only two to three simultaneous letter changes ever happening in one

paragraph. Clearly this isn't anywhere near enough to make a new recipe in our book, and neither are a few mutations in the DNA anywhere near enough to produce a new and useful feature. All organisms have large amounts of DNA, so the argument applies across the board.

Yet further, DNA mutations in living things happen randomly. You will probably now be able to appreciate the real problem. How long would one have to experiment with just one recipe by randomly choosing single letters and placing them at random in the recipe before a new recipe suddenly popped out of the page? Similarly, how long do you think it

would take mutations to change our DNA so that we became something superior to what we are now?

EVERY CHANGE HAS TO COUNT

The evolutionist's principle is that every tiny change, if it is to 'stick' and not just get lost, must improve the organism's chances of survival. So every individual change must be useful. In our cookery book analogy, this would demand that every letter change, or every few letter changes, would have to produce a slightly better recipe. This is effectively what evolution demands.

So now we are pretty sure that mutations cannot truly improve anything, and certainly not produce entirely new organisms. Since the only real evidence we have is that mutations don't do what evolutionists would like to think they do, then evolution in its most comprehensive sense could not have occurred.'

Editor's note

The above article is a modified and condensed extract from the book 'A Challenge to Theistic Evolution' by Simon Perfitt and Laurie Broughton (pages 144-153) published by Dawn Christadelphian Publications. The book

includes more detailed arguments and a number of notes and references not shown here. For your copy see contact details on inside back cover.

Comment: *a different kind of recipe*

The recipe for life was laid down in the beginning by the Almighty Creator (Genesis:1, Matthew 19:4). His purpose was to display His majesty, wisdom and power, to proclaim His existence to the people He created 'in His image', so that we should recognise and worship Him, and one day come to share His glory.

The theory of evolution simply does not stand up to critical examination. It is an escape route from God included in the Apostle Paul's pithy description: '*the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge.*' (1 Timothy 6:20)

Paul's advice? **'Avoid'!**

Bible Questions and Answers

If the God of the Bible is a God of love, why does He allow suffering?

This is a question many people ask, and many others use as a reason not to believe in God. It is a very good question because the answer uncovers the very character and purpose of God with His creation, and His attitude towards what is good and what is evil. The world is certainly in a terrible mess in so many ways: wars, famines, pestilence, crime, disease and unnatural deaths caused by others. These result in untold trauma and suffering to millions, so why does God allow it?

The Bible has the answer

It requires humility and an open mind to think about and accept what we read in the Bible. In the opening chapters of Genesis, the first book of the Bible, we read about the creation of the world, the creation of plants and animals, and lastly the creation of man and woman. The commentary states that *'God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good'*. (Genesis 1:31)

Adam and Eve were placed in a beautiful garden, in a region called Eden, and Adam was asked to tend and keep it. (Genesis 2:8,15) But everything changed as we read in Chapter 3. Things started to go wrong. So, the question arises, why did God allow that to happen? Previously it is recorded in chapter 2 that a strict command had been given to Adam not to eat of the fruit of a particular tree in the centre of the garden. The account calls this *'the tree of the knowledge of good and evil'*. There was also another tree called *'the tree of life'*. No command was given about that tree. This is the record in Genesis chapter 2:

'Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die".'

Genesis 2:15-17

In these words, God was testing His new creation to see whether they would be obedient to His wishes. He gave Adam & Eve freewill to choose. The punishment for disobedience imposed by God was death. So here we begin to see the character of the God of the Bible. He requires obedience, otherwise there will be consequences. He did not create our first parents to be robots. He wanted, and still wants us to choose what is right in obedience to His commandments. Are we prepared to understand and accept that concept?

The introduction of sin and its consequences

The record describes how a serpent tempts Eve to disobey the command given. Eve takes the fruit and so does Adam; both must face the consequences. Disobedience will end in death. Death involves suffering for both the one dying, and others grieving. Disobedience to God's commands is described in the Bible as sin, so sin was the cause of the death sentence. But that was not all; there were further consequences imposed by the Creator, as recorded in Genesis chapter 3, all involving suffering in one form or another:

- ❖ God imposed on Eve the pain and suffering of labour in childbirth.
- ❖ God told Adam that the ground was now cursed. It would grow thorns and thistles and the man would have to struggle to grow crops to survive in a hostile environment, until he died and was buried in the very ground he tilled (Genesis 3:17-19). God said to Adam: *'In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return.'* (3:19)

What have we learnt so far? God, the Creator, required obedience and gave our first parents a rule. The rule was broken by sin, and God imposed the consequences that involved suffering, a curse on the ground, and death.

Does God care?

So, are we to conclude that God is cruel and unloving with no purpose? Absolutely not! We have not yet examined God's words to the serpent which preceded His words to Eve and to Adam. These words are crucial and are found in Genesis 3:14-15. Firstly, the serpent (a creature God had made) was to be cursed and condemned to slither along the

ground from then on. However, verse 15 contains a hidden promise of a solution; the hint of a greater plan to rid the earth of sin. Look at these words carefully to see whether you can understand a deeper meaning:

‘And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.’ Genesis 3:15

In this verse ‘*enmity*’ means a state of opposition between the offspring of the woman and the offspring of the serpent. The offspring of the serpent indicates the multiplication of sin, now endemic in human nature. Freewill allows choices, good and bad. In subsequent generations, two classes of people would be the result, who would be at odds with each other. The ‘seed of the serpent’ would be those who ignored God’s commands and lived lives of unrepented sin. On the other hand, ‘the seed of the woman’ would be those who, despite being sinners, would try to follow God’s ways.

Jesus Christ – the seed of the woman

However, the reference to the seed of the woman in this verse is a singular noun – it speaks of a single person – ‘He’. We can therefore see in this

verse a hidden meaning – a promise. Jesus Christ was the eventual offspring of Eve – the seed of the woman. The serpent would be bruised in the head which speaks of a fatal blow to sin. Jesus died to take away sin. He lived a sinless life and died as a necessary sacrifice, which destroyed sin and dealt it a fatal blow. In accomplishing this he suffered a ‘*wound in the heel*’ symbolising his death, from which he was released after three days, for God raised him from the dead.

So, does God care about sin in the world? Yes, He does care, and it grieves Him deeply. Genesis 3:15 shows that, from the very beginning, He had in mind a plan to rid sin from the earth through the saving work of His son Jesus Christ.

The purpose of God to rid the world of sin and suffering

In Romans chapter 8, the Apostle Paul sets this out in his commentary on the purpose of God with His creation. This involves suffering as a consequence of sin, and its eventual removal from the earth. The act of God, in imposing suffering as a punishment for sin, is called ‘*futility*’ in this passage, but that is not the end of the matter. Notice that Paul

even makes reference to labour pains as a symbol of the suffering experienced on this earth before the birth of the kingdom age when there will be big changes:

‘For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labours with birth pangs together until now.’

Romans 8:18–22

‘The children of God’ are those who are prepared to believe and have faith in the purpose of God in Christ to remove sin’s influence, first in their own lives by seeking forgiveness, and second in the whole world after Jesus returns to establish his kingdom on the earth. The birth of a new age is

alluded to here, after the terrible pain and suffering of the present world, where sin reigns unchecked among its population.

Romans chapter 8 is just one chapter in the Bible where the character of God is described, the means of forgiveness of personal sin, and His ultimate intention to rid the whole world of sin through His son. Here is described the love of God in providing His son to be a mediator, through whom our sins may be forgiven. Forgiven sin relates the believer to peace of mind now and everlasting life, free of all suffering in the new age to come. It's recommended that you read the whole of Romans chapter 8 to see the force of Paul's teaching. Here are further extracts on this theme:

‘And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.’

8:28

‘... If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect? It

is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?' 8:31-35

'Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.' 8:37-39

Conclusion

Suffering is an inevitable part of the backcloth of our lives, imposed by God because of sin in the world. The most obvious symptoms of unrestrained sin among nations are wars, leading to worldwide suffering, food shortages and death on a huge scale. As we learn from the first book of the Bible, the introduction of sin by Adam and Eve resulted in the earth being cursed, with its

consequences of famine, disease and death.

We cannot remove these conditions by our own efforts. They are divinely imposed as part of God's plan of redemption from sin for true believers. Even Christ had to suffer in his mortal life to rid the world of sin. This saying was true of Christ, and it is true of the lives of all children of God who understand the need for redemption and forgiveness: 'No suffering – no salvation'. True believers understand that all suffering will eventually be removed from the earth as part of God's plan, as described in the following passage in the last book of the Bible:

'... "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new".'

Revelation 21:3-5

Justin Giles *London, UK*

The TRINITY

Is the doctrine of the Trinity a biblical concept?

Part 2

I'm sure that after reading Part 1 in the previous issue (Light Volume 34.2) many of my readers will have been fidgeting in their seats – if not jumping out of them – impatient to refer me to the Bible passages that they feel amply support the doctrine of the Trinity. But please ask yourself as we now proceed: “If I did not have the Trinity already in mind would I have deduced it from any passage that apparently supports the idea?”

At one time a passage from the letter of John was always quoted as proof: *“For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.”* (1 John 5:7)

For centuries this was the proof text to demonstrate the Trinity, but now it is never mentioned in its support. Why? Because it is widely recognised that this was a fraudulent addition, dating from about the fifth century. Most modern versions omit this reference, often without even a word of explanation. So, whilst it cannot now be used in support of the doctrine, it makes one ask that if the Bible clearly taught the doctrine elsewhere in its pages, why did some scheming copyist feel the need to insert it?

“But”, you might say, “there are many other passages that imply the Trinity even if they do not actually spell it out.” Well, let's look at some.

But before that I would like to repeat something I said previously. If one comes to the Bible with preconceived ideas it is sometimes possible to find a few verses that appear to support them. But that is entirely different from coming to the Bible with an open mind to learn what it really teaches. This is particularly true of the Trinity, as the following examples will show.

“I and my Father are one” (John 10.30)

The saying: “A quotation without a context is a pretext”, applies here. Read the verses prior to this phrase to see what Jesus is really saying. He is referring to the safety of *“his sheep”*, and gives them two guarantees of protection. The first is in his own ability and love: *“neither shall anyone snatch them out of my hand”* (v.28). But in addition, they have the even

greater protection afforded by his Father: *“My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of my Father’s hand”* (v.29). So here is a double guarantee: both God and Jesus will protect true Christians. And in this intention and ability to protect the sheep Jesus and his Father are united: *“I and my Father are one”*. This is obviously Christ’s meaning. Jesus and his Father are as one in their desire and ability to care for those who believe. Thus, his words have no Trinitarian overtones. And note that even in this regularly quoted passage the Trinity is excluded by Christ’s express statement that his Father is the greater!

‘Before Abraham was, I AM’ (John 8.58)

Trinitarians claim that here Jesus is applying to himself the name by which God revealed Himself to Moses at the burning bush: *“And God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM’. And he said, ‘Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, “I AM has sent me to you”.’”* (Exodus 3.14) In recent Bible versions the Trinitarian bias of the translators is shown by capitalising the *“I AM”*, but, as stated earlier, there is no such capitalisation in the original manuscripts. Translating *“I am”* in this way is simply an attempt to foist the translator’s personal predilections on the readers.

The phrase *“I am”* is a translation of two common Greek words *ego eimi*, which occur frequently in the New Testament. It simply means *“I am the one”* and in almost every place it occurs it is translated as *“I am he”*. Because the *“he”* does not occur in the Greek, in Bible translations it is usually added in italics to make the sense clear – as in all other instances but this one.

There are examples of this phrase in the very same chapter in John, which obviously have no Trinitarian connotation: *“If you do not believe that I am he, you will die in your sins... When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself”*. (John 8.24, 28) You might ask why the translators did not use capital letters for *“I am he”* in these cases.

Jesus used similar language when he claimed his Messiahship to the woman of Samaria. She said: *“‘I know that Messiah is coming’ (who is called Christ). ‘When he comes, he will tell us all things.’ Jesus said to her, ‘I who speak to you am he.’”* (John 4.25–26. For other clearly non-trinitarian implications of

ego eimi see Luke 21.8; John 9.9; 13.19; 18.5; 18.8; Acts 10.21; Revelation 1.18; 2.23.) Thus, when Jesus was asked if he was the Messiah he simply replied, “Yes, *I am the one.*”

What, then, was Jesus meaning by saying that before Abraham existed: “I am he”? He was simply stating that he was the promised Messiah – the one promised to Abraham; and says that with the eye of faith that patriarch looked forward with joy to the arrival of his notable descendant. (John 8.56)

“The Word made flesh”

This passage has been in my consciousness for over 70 years, ever since as a young schoolboy I queried the Trinity with my Religious Instruction master. He turned me to John 1.1: *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him.”* (John 1.1–3) He said that “*the Word*” meant Jesus, as shown by verse 14: *“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”* “There you are”, he commented, “Jesus, the Word, existed from the beginning and then took on human flesh at his birth.” My inexperience prevented any disputing this interpretation, but if he were with me now, I would make the following observations:

- ❖ We must not interpret John’s writings in a way that contradicts the clear teaching of other Scripture. John had a very unique form of expression that often had a different “under the surface” meaning.
- ❖ I would point out that “*Word*” is a translation of the common Greek word *logos* and there is nothing to indicate that it needs a capital letter.
- ❖ Further, in the eminent Greek scholar Tyndale’s translation of the New Testament (the basis for our King James version) *logos* is correctly translated as “*it*” rather than “*him*”: *“In the beginning was that word, and that word was with God: and God was that word. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by it, and without it, was made nothing that was made. In it was life...”* (John 1.1–4, Tyndale 1535.) This rendering was also adopted in the Geneva Bible of 1560 (the commonly used version in Elizabethan and Puritan times) and the Bishop’s Bible of 1568, both of which also give no hint of personality attached to “the

word". It was only when the bishops convened to produce the 1611 King James Version that their Trinitarian prejudices turned Tyndale's "it" into "him".

Sorry, but we need to introduce a bit of Greek here – otherwise we cannot get just what John meant by "word". As just mentioned, it is the Greek word *logos* – from which we derive many of our everyday words. For example, "biology" is literally the "word" (*logos*) about "life" (*bios*). A Greek lexicon defines *logos* as meaning: "The expression of thought (a) as embodying a conception or idea; (b) a saying or statement". (Vines Expository Dictionary of New Testament words; Oliphants Ltd, 1940). It does not simply mean a group of letters, as "a word" indicates today.

So, let's put these first-century meanings (as given by the lexicon) into John's opening verses: "In the beginning was the idea, and the idea was with God, and the idea was God. This conception was in the beginning with God. All things were made through it." Does that now convey, let alone demand, the existence of an additional person who was present at the beginning?

Isn't John actually saying that at the beginning God had a plan – a plan that was inseparable from Him? And that plan was expressed in His word – as He says through Isaiah: "*So shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me void... and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.*" (Isaiah 55.11) The "word" is the thoughts and purposes of God in action.

Right from the beginning God had a plan for the earth and mankind – a plan that was inseparable from Himself – a plan for which He created the world – a plan that necessitated the coming of a saviour. And, as John goes on to say, that plan, that word, materialised in the person of Jesus: "*And the word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.*" (John 1.14) To quote William Barclay, the much respected Bible scholar, "we might well translate John's words, 'The mind of God became a man.'" (W Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, p. xxii) So John is saying that at the coming of Jesus, God's age-old plan was being put into effect. He was not implying that Jesus was God or had personally existed from before the creation.

‘I have come down from heaven’ (John 6.38)

Jesus often used language like this, which, taken at face value, suggests that he had a previous existence in heaven. But, along with many other of Christ’s words recorded only by John, a literal interpretation is excluded by other Scripture.

In this instance, Jesus was comparing his teaching with the manna sent by God from heaven at the Exodus that sustained Israel in the wilderness. (Exodus 16) He said that unlike Moses who thus gave them literal food from heaven, God was now giving the “*true bread from heaven*” – Jesus himself. Of this he said: “*This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die.*” (John 6.50) So Jesus was not indicating that he had literally come down from heaven, but that he was the counterpart of the heaven-sent manna, which if spiritually “eaten” brings eternal life.

There are several other references, exclusive to John, where Jesus appears to say that he was in heaven previous to his life on earth. (John 3.13; 3.31; 6.38; 8.32; 16.28; 17.5)

The fact that all these allusions to Christ coming down from heaven are found only in the gospel record of John should make us pause. Did the other New Testament writers know of the pre-existence of Christ in heaven but did not mention it? Or could it be that John had a distinctive way of looking at the words of Jesus that bids us look beneath their apparent meaning?

Many of Christ’s sayings recorded by John were not intended to be taken literally, although sometimes his hearers did just that. When Jesus told Nicodemus that he needed to be ‘*born anew*’, he first took a literal interpretation: “*How can a man be born when he is old?*” (John 3.4) When Jesus said to the Jewish leaders: “*You are from beneath; I am from above,*” (John 8.23) he was obviously using figurative language, for they did not come from under the ground. He later admitted that such figurative language was his practice. (John 16.25)

Peter clearly explains the true situation – that prior to his birth Jesus existed in the mind of God, and God’s intention regarding him was not put into effect until his birth actually took place: “*He indeed was foreordained*

before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you.”
(I Peter 1.20)

‘In the form of God’ (Philippians 2.3–11)

There is another passage to which trinitarians invariably turn in support of their belief in the deity of Jesus. It is one that superficially supports the doctrine, especially if someone comes to it with the Trinity already in mind. The key passage speaks of Jesus who, *“being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men”*. (Philippians 2.6–7)

It is claimed that this describes the incarnation of Jesus, who having existed in heaven with God divested himself of his divinity and became a man.

We need to ask some questions about this. Paul is trying to impress on his readers the need for them to copy the humility of Christ. The previous verse reads: *“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.”* So we ask, how could the Philippians copy Christ in the particular way that Paul was suggesting? Could they also come down from heaven and become man? As a Professor of Divinity once said: “Paul is begging the Philippians to cease from dissension and to act with humility towards each other... It is asked whether it would be quite natural for him to enforce these simple moral lessons by incidental reference (and the only reference that he ever makes) to the vast problem of the mode of the incarnation.” (A.H. McNeile, *New Testament Teaching in the Light of St. Paul's*, 1923, p.65–66)

Or another scholar: “Looking afresh at Philippians chapter 2, we must ask the question whether Paul in these verses has really made what would be his only allusion to Jesus having been alive before his birth. The context of his remarks shows him to be urging the saints to be humble. It is often asked whether it is in any way probable that he would enforce the lesson by asking his readers to adopt the frame of mind of one who, having been eternally God, made the decision to become man.” (A Buzzard, *Who is Jesus?* P.20)

True. Would it not have been more appropriate for Paul to have pointed to the inspiring example of Christ’s humility and self-sacrifice in his human life than in a previous heavenly one?

One further point of many that we could make: Paul goes on to say that as a result of Christ's humility and obedience even to death: *"God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name."* (Philippians 2:9) Several points arise here: (1) Jesus was exalted as a result of his humility, therefore he could not have previously been divine; (2) Jesus was then given *"the name"* above every name, so clearly he did not possess that divine name earlier; and (3) Christ's exaltation was *"to the glory of God the Father"*, implying the lesser status of the Son.

The greatness of Jesus

But in all the foregoing, which shows that Jesus was not a component of a divine Trinity and that he has a lesser status, we certainly do not demean the person, the life, the works and the achievements of our Saviour. He was absolutely unique, the *"express image"* (Hebrews 1.3) of the Father, and spiritually he resided *"in the bosom of the Father"*. (John 1.18) All men should therefore *"honour the Son just as they honour the Father"*. (John 5:23) He was the Word of God revealed to us, expressing to mankind God's attributes, thoughts, example and purpose. He will become King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Revelation 19.16) and is worthy of all the praise, adoration and honour that poor mortals can bestow. (Revelation 5:12) Next to God he is the greatest being in the universe.

But he is **not God** in the Trinitarian sense.

Editor's Note:

This is the second extract taken from Peter Southgate's book entitled 'A challenge to all Christians' – see back cover. The book is available free of charge from the Correspondence Secretary (see inside back cover for contact details).

signs of the times

‘As the toes were partly iron and partly clay, so this kingdom will be partly strong and partly brittle. And just as you saw the iron mixed with baked clay, so the people will ... not remain united, any more than iron mixes with clay.’

Daniel 2:42-43 NIV

In these articles I often refer to the prophecy of Nebuchadnezzar’s image in Daniel chapter 2. I do so again because the last part prophesies a theme running through so much of humankind’s current interactions. That theme is **‘fragmentation’**; no one seems to be able to agree, let alone act together, on matters of global urgency. Keep this theme of fragmentation in mind as we consider several current world problems. It seems several themes are dominating world affairs at present. I find it helpful to view the unfolding of signs in our times through the lens of these themes. These are, in no particular order of priority:

❖ Environment

There is enormous and continuing damage to our environment. This theme pops up in the media, most often as the still controversial concept of climate change. The many other problem areas e.g., microplastics in the oceans, extreme weather events and pollution, surface to public attention less often. Whatever our views may be on the ‘hows’ and ‘whys’ of these matters, it seems beyond argument to us that the human race is destroying our environment. More on this a little later in this article.

❖ The power of the US diminishes

The 20th Century has been labelled the ‘American Century’. This is in recognition of how much the US has dominated world affairs,



especially in the second half of that century. But we now see that domination breaking down. The US remains for now the dominant military power in the world, but is now rivalled in its economic domination by China, with military parity likely in the not-too-distant future. The US dollar still underpins the world's financial systems, but one must wonder for how much longer, when looking at the state of US debt levels, and their reckless disregard for any fallout on the worldwide economy as a consequence of their actions. Internationally, memories of President Trump's 'anti-allies' attitude are still fresh. As but one example, he threatened to pull out troops from South Korea. That, and more, has cast doubt on the continuity of American support regardless of who is president at the time.

❖ Fragmentation

The world order that has mostly maintained relative peace and prosperity, particularly to the 'western' nations, since the end of World War II, has been seriously eroded. National self-interest and the growth of countries, particularly in the Southern hemisphere, who do not see the

benefit of aligning with the US or anyone else, is helping to drive this trend.

❖ Inequity

In the 1980's the Australian music group Midnight Oil wrote words that sum up this theme very well. It's a theme that is alive, universal and getting worse. Their words were 'the rich get richer and the poor get the picture'. The gap between the rich and the rest grows in virtually every country with all the social and other problems this leads to.

❖ Israel

Mr Netanyahu's current right wing dominated coalition government is taking extreme stances on internal matters, particularly justice, and on the ownership of the West Bank. Their view, at least in the extreme elements of the fragile governing coalition, is that Israel 'owns' the West Bank. These views are not even popular in Israel, let alone internationally; but they are being enacted, nonetheless. It is not hard to see the coming fulfilment of Bible prophecies about Israel. Zechariah is a good example:

**'For I will gather all the
nations to battle against
Jerusalem...'**

Zechariah 14:2



A last note on these themes: I have separated them, but they are clearly interconnected with each other. For example, you can link money and wealth with the first four, and, less obviously, it may well be linked with the fifth.

The nations arm themselves

We are seeing, perhaps, a consequence of the third theme of fragmentation: the breakdown of the world order, or perhaps a theme in its own right; nations are arming themselves. The prophet Joel had this to say:

‘Proclaim this among the nations: Prepare for war! Rouse the warriors! Let all the fighting men draw near and attack. Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears. Let the weakling say, “I am strong!”’
Joel 3:9-10 NIV

An article in The Guardian from May 2023 is of interest here and will suffice to make the point. The headline is ‘UK arms sales reach record £8.5bn as global tensions escalate’ and: ‘More than half of weapons exports were for repressive regimes such as Qatar and Saudi Arabia, as sales doubled last year’. The UK is far from alone in producing arms for sale. It’s a booming industry in many countries; in the language of the Old Testament prophet Joel: *‘beating plowshares into swords and pruning hooks into spears’* indeed!

The environment

‘... The time has come for judging ... and for rewarding your servants ... and for destroying those who destroy the earth.’

Revelation 11:18 NIV

I have referred to these words several times in past articles. ‘*Destroying*’ as used in this verse can apply to both moral and physical destruction.

Let's focus on the physical and look at a brief selection of headlines, from within just a few weeks prior to the time of writing this article (late June). These all relate in some way to the environment, particularly climate changes. They show these issues are very much in the media. There are many, many more instances across a wide variety of sources that you can easily find for yourself.

LATEST NEWS HEADLINES

Beijing records hottest June day since weather records began as heatwave hits China. Nanjiao weather station in southern Beijing hits 41.1C, half a degree higher than the station's previous monthly record .

The Guardian June

Is climate change outpacing our ability to predict extreme heatwaves?

The Conversation 20 June

Canada is on fire, and big oil is the arsonist. Governments need to represent us, not fossil-fuel profiteers. We need plans to phase out fossil fuel production and emissions.

The Guardian 20 June

Asia's heatwave prompts climatologists' warning amid UN report on rising global temperatures. There are fresh warnings about soaring heat in south and south-east Asia as a UN report warns global temperatures will very likely hit new records within the next five years

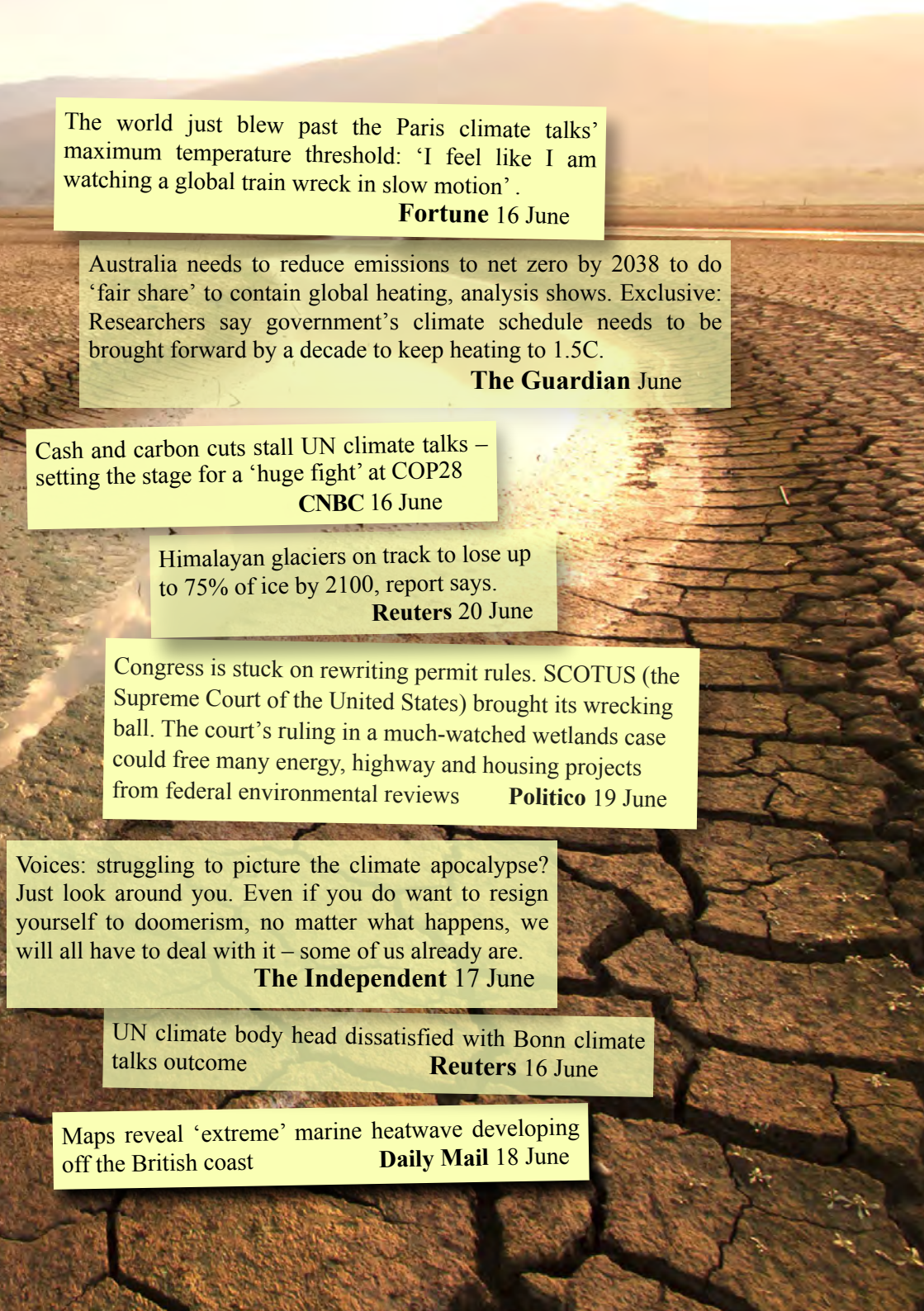
ABC News 25 May

The hard right and climate catastrophe are intimately linked. This is how. As climate policy is weakened, extreme weather intensifies, and more refugees are driven from their homes – and the cycle of hatred continues

The Guardian 15 June

Senate [that is the US senate] examines role of 'dark money' in delaying climate action. The budget committee hearing looked into alleged misinformation from big oil that covered up 'massive' risks of the climate crisis

The Guardian June



The world just blew past the Paris climate talks' maximum temperature threshold: 'I feel like I am watching a global train wreck in slow motion'.

Fortune 16 June

Australia needs to reduce emissions to net zero by 2038 to do 'fair share' to contain global heating, analysis shows. Exclusive: Researchers say government's climate schedule needs to be brought forward by a decade to keep heating to 1.5C.

The Guardian June

Cash and carbon cuts stall UN climate talks – setting the stage for a 'huge fight' at COP28

CNBC 16 June

Himalayan glaciers on track to lose up to 75% of ice by 2100, report says.

Reuters 20 June

Congress is stuck on rewriting permit rules. SCOTUS (the Supreme Court of the United States) brought its wrecking ball. The court's ruling in a much-watched wetlands case could free many energy, highway and housing projects from federal environmental reviews

Politico 19 June

Voices: struggling to picture the climate apocalypse? Just look around you. Even if you do want to resign yourself to doomerism, no matter what happens, we will all have to deal with it – some of us already are.

The Independent 17 June

UN climate body head dissatisfied with Bonn climate talks outcome

Reuters 16 June

Maps reveal 'extreme' marine heatwave developing off the British coast

Daily Mail 18 June

My purpose in quoting these headlines is simply to indicate that the state of our environment, and what the future may hold for it, is an issue of serious concern. Though there's certainly a lot of argument about the degree of danger, and even in some quarters the existence of a problem, the weight of scientific evidence suggests, at a minimum, there is a serious set of problems. It's not all about climate change either. Pollution and other environmental matters e.g., microplastics in the oceans, constitute a serious problem. The future of the human race, if we are left to our own devices, looks decidedly grim.

Conclusion

Fragmentation, indecision, alliance-breaking, misinformation, inability to agree even on potentially existential questions, and so much more! It all seems to be on the increase. It really is a blessing not to be concerned about the grim future as a consequence of all these things. Saddened but not concerned; rather, looking at what's going on as a sign of the closeness of good things to come! This is because to Bible believers all this is both a definite sign that Jesus Christ will come again, probably soon, and also a

demonstration of just how badly the world needs him to return.

Jesus said to his disciples, speaking of our times:

'And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near.'

Luke 21:25-28

The last message of Jesus in the last chapter of the last book of the Bible is this: *'He who testifies of these things says, "Surely I am coming quickly"'* (Revelation 22:20) and the response of the Apostle John is one that echoes the thoughts of all true believers:

'Even so, come, Lord Jesus!'

David Gamble Melbourne, Australia

Personal standards

In these articles so far, we have considered what are the 'first principles' or the foundation doctrines of true Christianity. It is essential that we know and believe these, but that knowledge of itself does not give us the hope of salvation. That knowledge brings with it responsibilities and should make us want to change our way of thinking and behaving. We should be asking, as some of Peter's audience in Jerusalem did: '*...what shall we do?*' (Acts 2:37) This, and the final article in this series, will explain the standard of life that God requires of us.

Baptism

This has already been considered in a previous article. It marks a break with our old life and the start of a new one. As Paul explains, we change from being servants of sin to servants of righteousness. *Read: Romans 6: 17-23*

Separation

Through baptism we become not only servants of God but also his children, brothers and sisters of Jesus and of each other (Matthew 23:8-9). Members of God's family must show the difference between themselves and the rest of the world by the way they live their lives. This separation is a command. It means standing aside from the ambitions, false worship and many pleasures of this world.

'...Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.'

James 4:4

Jesus said of his followers: '*They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.*' (John 17:16) Each of his followers should be preparing a character which will please him when he returns to the earth to '*give to every one according to his work.*' (Revelation 22:12) To achieve this necessitates separation from many of the ways in which most men and women spend their time, resources and energy.

Read: John 17:14-16; 1 John 2:15-17; 2 Corinthians 6:15-18.

The mind of Christ

Jesus has shown us what a Godly life means. His life was dedicated to doing the will of God. He trained his mind to think about God by careful reading and reflection on God's Word and by prayer. He preached the gospel and carried out many acts of kindness and forgiveness but was uncompromising toward ungodliness. He lived in the world but was not worldly, and his followers are required to do the same.

We need to develop the mind of Christ as much as possible, and this will be done by training our thoughts, because our thoughts lead to our actions. The mind feeds on what it sees and hears, and this is why separation from ungodly influences is important. Also, we cannot worship with those who do not believe the true gospel. *Read: Philippians 4:8-9; John 4:24.*

Reading the Bible

Regular daily reading of the Bible is essential if we are to grow in our knowledge of God and His plan for the earth. When we are baptised, the Bible describes us as new-born babies who drink only milk, but as we mature and develop, we are likened to eating more substantial food from God's Word. *Read: 1 Peter 2:2; Hebrews 5:12-14; Job 23:11-12.*

It has already been mentioned that many things that Israel experienced in their wilderness journey were types or shadows from which we need to learn lessons for ourselves. For example, God provided manna for them to eat. They had to gather it every day apart from the sabbath. Jesus refers to this God-given provision of food when he describes himself as the bread of life (John 6:35). It is on his teaching that we must feed. Just as we eat natural food every day so we should absorb spiritual food daily from God's Word. We urge you to use a Bible reading plan to ensure that you do not miss out on any parts. If followed, it will ensure that over the course of a year you will read the Old Testament once, and the New Testament twice.

(Editor's note: Send for your free Bible Reading Planner – see contact details on inside back cover. The plan is printed as a centre-page pull-out in Light Vol 27.1 'Opening up the Bible', downloadable from our website).

Prayer

The believer in God has the privilege of praying to Him through Jesus as our mediator (John 16:24) and is encouraged to do this frequently. Under the Old Testament Law of Moses, the priests offered incense morning and evening (Exodus 30:7-8). Since incense is a recognised symbol of prayer (Revelation 8:4) it follows that a believer is being encouraged to pray at least twice a day. Prayer is needed to obtain forgiveness of our sins, for guidance in everyday life, for the coming of God's kingdom, for God to look after those who are in trouble in any way. Prayer can be offered at any time of day or night, whenever we feel the need to praise or thank God for all He gives us, or when we need His help.

Read: I Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 2:17-18; Hebrews 4: 14-16; I Thess.5:17.

The breaking of bread

Before Jesus suffered, he met with his disciples to eat the passover meal. While they were eating, he instituted a new meal (Mark 14:22-25). This is the origin of what is known as the communion service or, in New Testament terminology, the breaking of bread. Christ's followers come together regularly to remember Jesus in eating bread and drinking wine as he commanded. It is also an opportunity for self-examination, a time to compare our love with his and to test our obedience against his perfect example. The physical act of eating and drinking signifies our absorption of Jesus' words and mind and disposition. The disciples originally shared this meal together. It was an act of fellowship or communion. We are told that they did this on a regular weekly basis, on the first day of the week, the equivalent of Sunday today.

Read: I Corinthians 10:16-17; 11: 23-29; Acts 20:7.

Obedying Christ's commands

From baptism onwards we try to ensure that all we think, say and do is in accordance with the commands of Jesus. This is the way to develop our characters so that we may become more like him. *Read: Romans 12:1-2.*

Obedience to human authority and laws

Reference has already been made in this series to the principles of separation from the world in terms of attitude and behaviour and non-resistance to evil. Applying these principles in daily life will inevitably raise practical questions as to how a believer should react to certain organisations, especially those under the control of governments or others in authority. However, the principle governing our attitude towards such is clearly set out by the Apostle Paul in the New Testament.

It is not for us, therefore, to distinguish between good and bad ‘governing authorities’. Whether or not we agree with their policies does not alter our duty. For example, Jesus showed this by paying taxes to the Roman authorities who later crucified him.

Read: Romans 13:1-7; Matthew 17:24-27; 22:15-22.

We also have a duty to pray for the authorities. Believers will not therefore take part in demonstrations or organised protests against governments or other authorities however much they disagree with their decisions.

Read: Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13-17; 1 Timothy 2:1-4.

But, where their instructions lead to conflict with the laws of God, our duty is to obey God rather than human authorities. World affairs are under God’s control and leaders of nations will be put in place to ensure that His purpose is carried out according to His overall plan to set up His kingdom here on earth.

Read: Acts 5:27-29; Daniel 2:44; 4:17.

Because of this, the followers of Jesus do not get involved in politics or assist in the propaganda of political parties, still less stand as their representative. If they live in a country where they are entitled to vote they will not exercise that privilege. Because God is in control, it is not their place to become involved in the choice of who should lead their country. They regard themselves as ‘*strangers and pilgrims on the earth*’ seeking a kingdom to come.

Read Hebrews 11:13-16.

Personal relationships

The closest personal relationship for many people is marriage. The relationship between husband and wife is clearly set out in the Bible and is the union of one man with one woman. The husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church. Woman's position was defined after the fall in Eden: *'your desire shall be to your husband, and he shall rule over you.'* (Genesis 3:16) However, the husband has a duty to love and give honour to his wife. Marriage represents the relationship between Christ and his church. Divorce is not permitted and is an area where the commands of Jesus and the apostles must override human practices to the contrary.

Read: I Peter 3: 1-7; Ephesians 5: 22-25; Mark 10: 6-12; I Cor. 7:10-11.

Same sex marriage and sexual activity between members of the same sex are strictly forbidden in both Old and New Testament teaching. They cannot possibly represent Jesus, the bridegroom, and his spiritual bride who is always pictured in God's Word as a woman. The Bible describes the creation by God of the first woman – Eve. She was needed as a companion and a help for Adam and to enable God's command that first man and woman should *'be fruitful and multiply; and fill the earth'* (Genesis 1:27-28).

In God's law given through Moses to the nation of Israel, sexual activity between two men is called an *'abomination'* (a thing that causes disgust or loathing) and is detestable to God (Leviticus 20:13). In the New Testament the same principle is applied to Christians and includes sexual activity between women. In his letter to the Christians in Rome the Apostle Paul describes these detestable practices which were prevalent in first century Rome:

'...God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with one other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.'

Romans 1:26-27 NIV

Paul wrote to the Christians at Corinth that sexual immorality, including practices such as adultery and homosexual relationships, will exclude a person from the coming Kingdom of God in the same way as will other ungodly behaviour. In his first letter to Timothy, Paul makes the point that God's law is designed to turn people away from the immoral practices which were so widespread in the First Century, including those who indulge in sexual activity outside the marriage relationship.

Read: Genesis 1:27-28; 2: 21-24; Leviticus 18: 22; 20:13; I Corinthians 6: 9-10; I Timothy 1: 9-10.

Conclusion

The standards required by true Christian believers are substantially different from many of the accepted rules of behaviour today, particularly in the western world, and there is a danger that we will be adversely affected by those with whom we must mix in our daily life. But Christ's commands are designed to make us as much like him as we can be, so that he will be pleased to allow us to be in his coming kingdom on the earth. It was never envisaged that this would be easy.

A godly way of life will always involve challenges to our natural human way of thinking, but this is what God is looking for – people who will put Him and His ways before their own. In this way they will be preparing themselves for the reward that He has promised. The Apostle Paul puts it like this:

‘Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect’.

Romans 12:2 ESV

IMPORTANT BIBLE WORDS

FAITH

Sir Isaac Newton was not just a great scientist, he was a man of faith.

Many will find that surprising. Today, faith has been attacked and ridiculed by a highly vocal group of scientists. Science, we are told, has delivered us from the superstition of religion, and proved God to be unnecessary. Faith is a relic of past ignorance.

Newton, like many of the early scientists who were also Christians, believed that the universe could be investigated precisely because it had been created by a rational mind, and therefore behaved in a logical way that could be analysed and explained. Scientists were ‘thinking God’s thoughts after Him’ as one of them put it.

The modern challenge to religion from Richard Dawkins and others has attacked the quality of faith itself, attempting to redefine the meaning of the word ‘faith’ in a quite unprecedented way. ‘Faith’ he says ‘is the

great copout, the great excuse to avoid the need to think and evaluate evidence. Faith is belief in spite of, even perhaps because of the lack of evidence... Faith is not allowed to justify itself by argument.’

Is there any substance to such extreme claims? That is what we need, however briefly, to examine.

Everyday faith

Religious faith is just a specific, limited application of a universal human quality. Faith means trust, belief – ‘confident belief in the truth and trustworthiness of a person, concept or thing’ (wikipedia). Everybody needs faith of some sort – it is impossible to go through life without at some time trusting someone or something. We trust people: our business partners, our family and our friends. We trust institutions: the government, the forces of law and order, financial institutions, etc. In all sorts of ways we entrust aspects of our lives to people and organisations outside our control.

But why do we trust one person and not another? Why do we put money in one bank and not another? Because

of our past experience and knowledge. If we trust somebody we don't really know, then we can hardly be surprised if they let us down. If our investments lose money because we haven't done our homework properly, then we may have only ourselves to blame. Our confidence needs to be based on knowledge – our trust, our faith, need evidence, a rational foundation.

Faith then in everyday life is based on evidence, on experience. We have faith in other people because we think we know them; we believe we can rely on their support in the future because of their support in the past. We trust organisations because of what we know about them, their past record giving us confidence in their future performance. Belief and confidence without evidence is just stupidity and credulity – **'blind faith'** in other words. That very expression implies that there is a faith which is **not** blind – genuine faith based on evidence.

Religious faith

We move from life in general, to faith in its religious sense. Is it really something entirely different to the everyday variety of faith that we have been talking about?

"Evidence" is the foundation. It is the word used by the Apostle in his famous definition of faith:

'now faith is the substance (confidence) of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen'.

Hebrews 11:1 KJV

Evidence is just as much a requirement for the Christian's religious faith as it is for faith of the everyday variety. What is different is the things that we place our faith in. Instead of the people we see every day, we are asked to place our faith in a Supreme Being who is literally invisible to us, and whose voice we cannot hear in any literal sense. We are asked to place our trust in His Son, whom we know only through records written nearly 2,000 years ago, whom also we cannot literally see or hear. Hence these words about *'things not seen'*. But the necessity for evidence is just as real, perhaps more so, because the objects of our trust are so much more important, and the consequences for us are so far-reaching.

The evidence for Christianity

The big question is, if faith without evidence is not genuine faith at all, what is the evidence for the fundamentals of the Christian religion? Note first of all that Christianity is

different to other major world religions, in that it is dependent on a series of (what are claimed to be) historical events. It is not just a philosophy or a system of morality – it is the story of a God who has intervened directly in human history through the life, death and resurrection of one very special human being, Jesus Christ. These events, if they are indeed historical, should stand up to the same test as other events from the same period – the evidence for them should be of the same type.

The Apostle Paul tells us that there is one event on which Christianity stands or falls: the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.



‘...if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty... if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!.’

I Corinthians 15:14–17

The early Christians were not just followers of Jesus because they admired his character or were swayed by his charisma. They accepted Jesus because they claimed to be eyewitnesses of his resurrection, or, if they had not seen him themselves, they believed the first-hand testimony of others who had. The Apostle Paul’s conversion on the road to Damascus was not some ecstatic or mystical experience – he says he saw and heard the risen Christ, and was left with temporary blindness, a physical reminder of the reality of his experience. He refers to more than 500 people who also had seen the risen Christ (I Corinthians 15:6) most of whom were still alive when he wrote. (See our website for series of four articles in Light Volumes 32.4–33.3 **‘Evidence for the Resurrection’**)

Nearly 2,000 years later their eyewitness testimony has been preserved in the New Testament for

No-one denied that the tomb was empty – but what had happened to Jesus’ body?

our benefit. How can we assess its value? Are the source documents authentic and reliable? Is this evidence that we can trust, and place our faith in? Volumes could be and have been written on this subject, but here are the conclusions of one member of the legal profession, one of several in this field who have weighed up the evidence:

‘As a lawyer I have made a prolonged study of the evidences for the events of the first Easter day. To me the evidence is conclusive, and over and over again in the High Court I have secured the verdict on evidence not nearly so compelling. Inference follows on evidence, and a truthful witness is always artless and disdains effect. The gospel evidence for the resurrection is of this class, and as a lawyer I accept it unreservedly as the testimony of truthful men to facts they were able to substantiate.’ (Sir Edward Clarke K.C.)

Faith in God

The resurrection of Jesus is the outstanding example of a miraculous event which can be dissected, the evidence assessed, and faith based on the weight of that evidence. But what about the biggest question of all – the existence of God himself? Is faith

in God based on good evidence, or is it just irrational sentimentality, the perpetuation of age-old superstitions?

In the letter he wrote to Christians at Rome, Paul says that the creation itself provides clear evidence to all men of the existence of God:

‘For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.’

Romans 1:19–20 ESV

William Paley, an 18th-century clergyman, argued that just as a watch by its intricacy, its organisation, its obvious purpose, provided its own evidence of its designer and creator (the watchmaker), so the natural order, the universe and the life-forms of our planet, showed clear evidence of their designer and Creator, the divine watchmaker. This argument has been widely derided by the scientific community in recent years. Yet Paley’s basic observation has not been queried – the natural world which surrounds us **looks as if**

it has been designed. The countless life-forms on our planet, the life processes and the organs which support life, the molecular coding, language and communication systems which control every form of life – they all appear to have a purpose, to have been designed to do a particular task – that is admitted, because it is inescapable.

Today we are told this appearance of design is an illusion. The watch-maker, they say, is blind – ‘natural selection’, Charles Darwin’s ‘brain-wave’, is the blind, unintelligent process which has this most remarkable property of producing an appearance of design, but it is only an appearance, so they say.

Why not accept what appears to be so obvious? Why dream up such an improbable process to get rid of the Creator? Why not accept the abundant evidence that God has given us of His divine, all-powerful hand at work in creation? An eminent physicist, Edgar Andrews wrote:

‘I was brought up to believe the duck theorem: ‘if it looks like a duck, walks like a duck and quacks like a duck, it probably is a duck. That is why I have problems with those who (1) admit that nature gives every evidence of being intelligently designed; (2)

introduce an alternative materialistic explanation for the appearance of design; and then (3) without further discussion conclude that only their alternative explanation can be true. Meet the neo-duckians, whose logic demands that ‘if it looks like a duck, walks like a duck and quacks like a duck, it is indubitably a chicken.’ Such are those who tell us that the cell’s molecular language is merely an accident of nature.’ (‘Who Made God?’ – Edgar Andrews)

Opening our minds to the evidence

John’s Gospel tells us about Jesus’ disciple Thomas, who was simply not prepared to believe that Jesus had risen from the dead. He was surrounded by a number of different men and women who all claimed to have seen and spoken to, and even eaten with Jesus on different occasions. These were all people he knew well – yet he was adamant he would never believe what they told him until he had seen Jesus himself and touched the wounds that proved his identity. Jesus was gracious and gave him the evidence he demanded. At the same time, he promised a blessing on all those who in the future would believe on him, without

making the demands of Thomas: *‘because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.’* (John 20:29)

The attack on faith in our day should not discourage us in any way, because Jesus predicted it: *‘when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?’* (Luke 18:8). The atheists and sceptics of our day have their role to play as God’s unfolding purpose nears its conclusion. If we acknowledge the power that brought one man back from the dead; if our minds are open to the evidence of God’s creative work; if we value the things that are not seen above those that are; if we follow the path God has shown us in His Word, then that faith will save us from the futility of human thinking and bring us to God’s Kingdom.

‘This is the victory that has overcome the world –

OUR FAITH’

I John 5:4

Roy Toms
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this magazine

Light on a new world

is published for
the Dawn Christadelphians by:

Light Bible Publications

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England

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Design: Roy Toms

ISSN 0047-4657

The Christadelphians believe the Bible (Old and New Testaments) to be the wholly inspired and infallible Word of God. Its principal theme is the salvation of mankind through the saving work of Jesus Christ, and the setting up of the kingdom of God under his rulership when he returns to the earth.

We believe that over the centuries the original message of Christianity has been corrupted. Light is published to provide a better understanding of the true Christian hope.

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The article on the Trinity in this edition of Light is an extract from Peter Southgate's book 'a Challenge to all Christians'.

Sadly in many areas the Bible's clear teaching has been altered in ways that render the true Christian message confusing and in some cases unintelligible.

This book asks the reader to look seriously at where they stand in relation to the message of Christianity as originally taught by Jesus and his apostles. All Christians have the responsibility to "earnestly contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 1.3.)

A free copy of this important book is available from **Light Bible Publications**, address overleaf.