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Volume 11
Number 3
**AUGUST
2014**

Editor's Introduction

You have just started to read another excellent issue of YPS. This comment is not a reflection of the fact that I am the editor, but serves to highlight the excellent articles that you are about to read.

My intro is extra short to give space for the articles. Rather than tell you what's coming I'll let you get on with your read.

Stephen Baker

Image Conscious Christians



BY **JONATHAN BLACK** LONDON, ENGLAND

If it matters to you what brand your phone is, or what label is on the bottom of your shoes, keep reading because you have all the signs of being an 'image conscious Christian!' We are ALL victims - influenced by a constant stream of promotions and advertisements that tell us 'you can't do without it today', yet knowing that it will be 'out of date' by tomorrow! Our world is dominated by updates, and upgrades - symptoms of a world driven by consumerism and dominated by mass media.

Wikipedia defines consumerism as 'a social and economic order and ideology that encourages the acquisition of goods and services in ever-greater amounts'.

YOUNG PRECIOUS SEED is a supplement of *Precious Seed International* designed for those young in faith. Its purpose is to restate timeless truths from the word of God for a new generation of Christians and to kindle a biblical approach to current issues in the world in which we live. YPS is published by *Precious Seed International*, Pitcot Farm, Pitcot Lane, Stratton-on-the-Fosse, Radstock BA3 4SX, UK, and is available separately from the main magazine.

Sound familiar?

Young Christians can easily get caught up in a 'must have' mentality, driven by a desire to be popular but, sadly, foreign to the teaching of God's word. The Bible has much to say about our image, with clear guidance as to how 'image conscious' we should really be.

The Bible defines the meaning of image in Genesis chapter 1 verse 26, 'And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness'. Our image is our likeness. God created us with a likeness after Himself. That likeness was spiritual, giving us a God-consciousness with a moral and spiritual awareness distinct from animals. This image was distorted through the entrance of sin, but God, in his wondrous grace, has redeemed us through the precious blood of Christ, who was not made in the image of God, because He is the 'express image' of God. The purpose of God in saving us is highlighted in Romans chapter 8 verse 29, 'to be conformed to the image of his Son'.

This begins the moment we are saved, and will only be complete only when we reach Heaven. In that day, Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians chapter 15 verse 49, 'As we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly'.

The word 'conformed' is the Greek word, *symmorphos* and means 'to have the same form as another or to be similar to another'. The challenge for young believers is whether they allow their image to be conformed and molded by the world, or by the word of God. Buying the latest smartphone to make your life more efficient makes perfect sense, but if your motivation for what you buy is only because everyone else has one, you are conforming to the crowd and not to Christ. He made Himself of no reputation, and chose to live in a place that certainly was not high on the image stakes! The question was asked, 'Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?' John 1. 46.

If your image is based on current trends, you will never be content, for it must be continually updated in response to each new fad. In contrast,

Paul tells us that, 'godliness with contentment is great gain', 1 Tim. 6. 6.

Your quest to achieve the image of reality TV stars, footballers, and WAGS, will lead to a carnal walk influenced by unbelievers. God expressly forbids us to be conformed to the image of the ungodly, 'And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God', Rom. 12. 2.

Today, many young people feel under pressure to alter their image on social networking sites. Perhaps the desire to have a following, to gain 'friends' and 'likes' can tempt you to create an online profile that is far from what you really are, and, more sinister, far from what you should be.

Daniel and his three Hebrew friends are an example of young people away from home who were pressurized to conform to the world of Babylon. Daniel's three friends refused to bow down to the image of gold, despite being in the minority, and facing death. However, God was with them in the fiery furnace, and rewarded their courage to stand for God, and not to worship a pagan image.

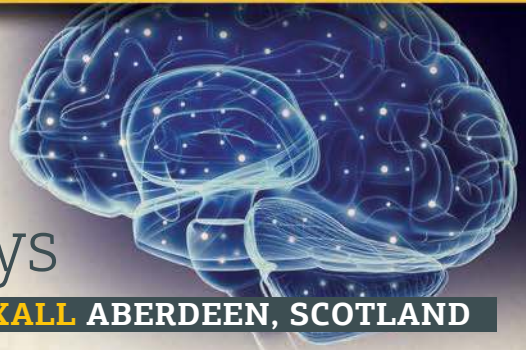
Maybe the next time you are tempted to queue all night for the latest iPhone, or you feel under pressure to buy a Hollister hoody just to improve your image, remember that you are not your own, you are bought with a price! When Christ was on earth He did not fulfill the image the world expected of a king. Their rejection of Him proved that, when it comes to being 'image conscious', the world gets it badly wrong!



PSALM 139. 13-18

Our Body and Our Days

BY PAUL COXALL ABERDEEN, SCOTLAND



In this Psalm, David asks two rhetorical questions, 'Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence?', v. 7. The answer, of course, was nowhere. Thoughts about God's comprehensive knowledge and presence had captivated David's mind. His reflections upon God were acts of worship. The pattern set by David is an example that should be followed today. Meditating or reflecting upon God's attributes is God-honouring and soul-strengthening.

In verse 13, David considers God's power. He thinks about God's power in designing him. Stephen Charnock, a believer in the 1600s, was recorded as saying, 'The power of God is that ability and strength whereby He can bring to pass whatsoever He pleases, whatsoever His infinite wisdom may direct, and whatsoever the infinite purity of His will may resolve'. The theological term used to describe God's power is omnipotence (from the Latin: *omni potens*: 'all power').

Our Body

David understood the complexity of the human body. Since his day, great advances have been made. As a result of research, we are now able to appreciate in more detail the great complexities and wonderful design that David spoke of. The great astronomer Johannes Kepler, the founder of celestial mechanics, described science as man attempting to 'think God's thoughts after Him'. In the study of the human body, we are able to see something of how God is a powerful and creative designer. George Gallup, the famous statistician, said, 'If I could prove God statistically; take the human body alone; the

chance that all of the functions of the individual would just happen, is a statistical monstrosity'.

The most powerful computer system that has been built by man cannot rival the human brain. The brain calculates and transmits billions of bits of information through the body. This information controls every action, right down to the blink of an eye. In the body, nerves carry the information back and forth through the central nervous system. And in just one human brain there is probably more 'wiring', more 'electrical circuitry', than in all the computer systems of the world put together.

The heart is a muscular pump actually forcing blood through thousands of miles of blood vessels. Blood carries food and oxygen to every part of the body. The heart pumps an average of six litres of blood every minute, and, in one day, pumps enough blood to fill more than 4,000 two-litre bottles.

The raw material for our body can be found in the 'dust of the ground'. However, these chemicals cannot arrange themselves into cell tissues, organs, and systems. The book of Genesis teaches that God took 'the dust of the ground', a heap of chemicals, shaped a man and then breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. Then, man became a living soul.

What makes man distinct from the rest of God's designs was that he was made in God's image. Sin has marred, but not destroyed this image. Through faith in Jesus Christ and by the work of the Holy Spirit, that image is being created in believers. Yes, only mankind can know God, and have a relationship with Him through prayer, praise, and worship. Truly, we are fearfully and wonderfully made, v. 14!

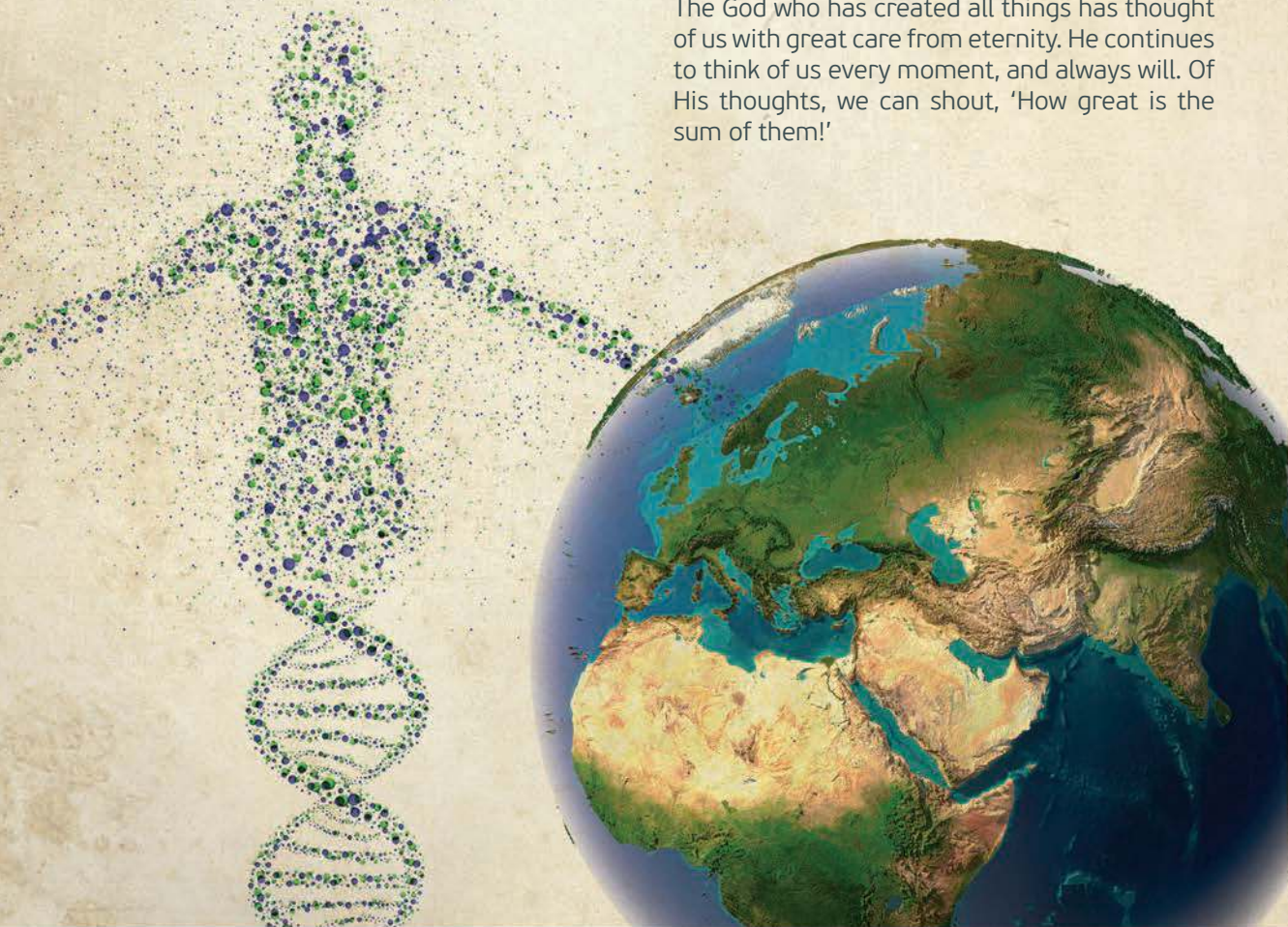
OUR BODY AND OUR DAYS - CONTINUED

Our Days

David took great comfort in the fact that God had written every one of David's days before there was even one of them, v. 16. The God who loved him, and knew what was best for him, had taken care of every detail of his life. God had planned David's life. The same truth holds for everyone today. What God had purposed before time began did not mean David was not responsible for his actions and choices. David could not say that his sin with Bathsheba, 2 Sam. 11, was inevitable and, therefore, not his fault. Likewise, all of us are responsible for every action and deed we commit.

There is always a tension between God's rule over all things, and man's responsibility. This is best illustrated by thinking about the cross. In Acts chapter 2 verse 23, Peter proclaims, 'This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men'. In one sentence, Peter states that the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus was God's plan before time began, yet also the men who crucified him were responsible. We can never fully comprehend how these are both true, but we know that they are.

The God who has created all things has thought of us with great care from eternity. He continues to think of us every moment, and always will. Of His thoughts, we can shout, 'How great is the sum of them!'



PREACHING WITH A TABLET

Part 3: Best Note Apps for Preaching

BY R. SCOTT THOMSON USA



'Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth', 2 Tim. 2. 15 ESV.

This is the third article in a series about using a tablet to study, and to preach.

In this article we will explore some helpful note-taking applications (apps), which are very useful for preachers. There are many excellent apps in this category; some are simple to use, and some are complex.

The main advantage of using a note-taking and editing app is the ability to quickly capture and then later edit your thoughts as you prepare to speak on any given topic, or scripture passage.

Here are a few apps to consider:

- **Notes** – All tablets come with a pre-installed note app. Do not overlook this basic, but highly useful tool. I rarely prepare an entire message while sitting at my desk. Thoughts, ideas, verses, and illustrations can come to mind at any time of day, regardless of where I am. The *Notes* app is the quickest way for me to capture those thoughts. The text can later be exported by either email or copy-and-paste, and placed in your more formal notes.
- **Notes Plus** – Not all thoughts are well captured in writing; many ideas are better drawn than written. *Notes Plus* is a low cost app that provides you with the right tools to capture your ideas through text, drawing, audio, or pictures. This is available on both *Apple* and *Android* platforms. One helpful feature is the ability to import and annotate PDF documents. The app offers intuitive methods of sorting and storing notes, and easily integrates with popular third party services such as *Dropbox* and *Google Docs*.

- **GoodReader** – is probably the best PDF reader on the market. But it is more than simply a tool to read PDFs. *GoodReader* handles a long list of different file formats, and provides the ability to highlight and annotate PDF files. One of *GoodReader's* many features is the ability to create and edit text files. To create a text file simply open up the 'Manage Files' dropdown and then tap 'New TXT'. When it is time to transfer what you have written from your tablet, *GoodReader* has a long list of ways to export your files, including over WiFi. The app is well worth the money.
- **Evernote** – Perhaps the best-known and loved note app is *Evernote*. This well developed and supported note-taking platform allows you to capture and edit just about anything (text, audio, web, pictures, etc.), from just about anywhere (with native apps for iOS, Android, PC, Mac, the web, and more). Best of all, this app is free. Be sure to check it out.

Sometimes it is easy to dismiss simple apps in favour of those with a long list of features. However, I would caution you not to overlook them. Remember we are looking at apps for sermon notes. We are not looking for a full-featured word processor to write a 500 page commentary on the book of Ezekiel! Ultimately, the best app for you will depend on your own personal style and needs.

One more tip: note apps (like any other app) can be used simultaneously with your favourite Bible app . . . simply open up both apps and then use the multitouch left/right swipe to quickly switch between apps.

Hopefully, these hints will help you as you study the word of God.

ADVENTURES IN ACTS

The Gospel Spreads



BY JEREMY SINGER BRIDGE OF WEIR, SCOTLAND

Acts chapters 8 to 10 describe a period of church growth geographically, numerically, and, more importantly, spiritually. In this article, we will see the underlying reason for the dispersion of the new believers: human hatred, and hostility is overruled by God's sovereignty, resulting in the progress of the gospel message. We will focus on three individual conversion accounts, which Luke records in remarkable detail.

1. The Ethiopian Eunuch, 8. 26-40.
2. Saul of Tarsus, 9. 1-30.
3. Cornelius, 10. 1-48.

Context

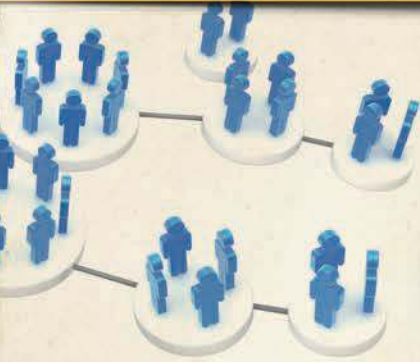
Stephen's martyrdom, 7. 60, sparks off intense persecution for the early church, 8. 1. The Christians are scattered, vv. 1, 4, like seeds sown in fertile ground. Rather than keeping a low profile to avoid further trouble the believers 'talk about the good news', v. 4 (my paraphrase), to everyone they meet. Are we as eager to share the gospel today, or do we prefer to avoid embarrassment by maintaining a 'guilty silence', as John Stott terms it?¹

The locations covered in this section stretch from Galilee in the north, 9. 31, to Gaza in the south, 8. 26, and Joppa on the Mediterranean coast, 9. 42-43. Key cities include Samaria, ch. 8, Damascus, ch. 9, and Caesarea, ch. 10. The disciples continue to follow the roadmap for evangelism as originally indicated by the risen Lord, 1. 8.

Conversions

Three specific conversion experiences are narrated in these chapters. It is instructive to see the differences between each account. The characters involved are clearly contrasting. Their *ethnic* backgrounds – from Africa, Israel and Italy – make them, respectively, descendants of Ham, Shem, and Japheth, Gen. 10. Their *social* backgrounds are also diverse. The eunuch is a noble courtier; Saul is a wise scholar; Cornelius is a mighty soldier; Paul, in 1 Cor. 1. 26, mentions the three categories. Their *religious* backgrounds are different. The Ethiopian is a pilgrim, perhaps a recent convert to Judaism, Acts 8. 27, the Hebrew is a determined persecutor from the Pharisee party, 9. 2, and the Roman is a good-living, God-fearing expatriate, 10. 1-2. Their initial encounters with the gospel are different. Whilst the eunuch was reading a Bible passage for the first time, Saul heard the voice of the Lord from heaven, and Cornelius had his prayer interrupted by an angel. God saves all kinds of people, 1 Tim. 2. 4, using different methods, 1 Cor. 9. 22.

There are also notable similarities in the three conversion experiences. Although each person is initially convicted without human intervention, God subsequently selects human agents to bring the gospel to bear on these individuals. Thus, Philip introduces himself (and his Lord) to the Ethiopian in his chauffeur-driven chariot; Saul is hailed as a 'brother' by Ananias; and Peter is fetched from thirty miles away to bring the gospel to Cornelius' house. Notably, the



ADVENTURES IN ACTS



angelic messenger does not communicate the gospel to Cornelius directly; instead, he simply advises Cornelius to send for Peter, Acts 10. 5-6. Like these bold evangelists, we must be available to serve God, with no hesitation due to inconvenience, fear, or distance.

The three new believers soon know the common consequences of salvation. They experience *joy*, e.g., 8. 39. They demonstrate the reality of their faith by *baptism*, e.g., 9. 18. They receive the indwelling *Holy Spirit*, e.g., 10. 44. We note in these chapters that the Spirit comes visibly to two groups of new believers, at Samaria, 8. 17, and Caesarea, 10. 44. Peter states that this phenomenon reminds him of how the Holy Spirit 'fell . . . on us at the beginning, 11. 15. These extraordinary Pentecostal reminders confirm that these new groups of believers are entirely genuine, 'as well as we', 10. 47.

Challenge

In their own way, each of these conversions was *surprising* to the evangelist involved. Philip was not expecting to meet a Bible-reading traveller in the desert, 8. 28. Ananias was not expecting to address Saul as a 'brother', 9. 17. Peter required significant prompting in his God-given vision to realize that even occupying Roman soldiers are eligible for divine blessing, 10. 28. Anyone can be saved, in God's sovereignty. We must believe this, and expect salvation when we share the gospel message with people around us.

Finally, we should notice that periods of persecution are temporary. There is a peaceful interim, 9. 31, when the church experiences consolidation. This growth is fuelled by a 'fear of the Lord', and an awareness of the Holy Spirit. For us, whether in difficulty or at peace, reverence for God, and dependence on the Spirit will bring energy and refreshment.

References

¹John Stott, J., *Our Guilty Silence*, Hodder and Stoughton, 1967.





Fact or Fairytale?

BY DR. PHILIP MULLAN BELFAST

You are in the centre of your nearest city, helping with some gospel literature distribution. A man in his early twenties approaches and asks, 'How do you know God is real?', or at lunchtime in school your friend asks, 'Why do you believe in Jesus?' What would you say?

First Peter chapter 3 verse 15 tells us we should 'be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you'. Would you be ready?

In my last article, I showed how nature itself, and in particular the human body, is proof of the existence of God. There is, however, a stronger, more indisputable proof of the gospel: the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

It is recorded in the Book of Acts that the apostles preached this fact as proof that Jesus is Lord. Let me give you some examples:

1. When Paul was preaching on his own in the pagan city of Athens, he preached the need to repent and proclaimed that God 'hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead', Acts 17. 31.
2. Shortly after this, when Paul was in the city of Corinth, his gospel message was not only that Jesus died for our sins, but that He was raised the third day, and that there were witnesses to this fact.

It is the bodily resurrection of Christ that is the proof that backs up our witness. First Corinthians chapter 15 verses 5-9 lists over six occasions when he was seen, and there were more! (See Luke 24 and John 20, 21). We could fill a courtroom to capacity with the witnesses of Christ's resurrection.

He was seen:

- I. by those who loved him (Peter, the twelve, all the apostles, over 500 of the brothers)
- II. by a sceptic (James, the Lord's brother)
- III. by a bitter enemy (Paul)

Time after time men and women verified that Christ really had risen from the dead! Unbelievers also saw Him risen, and as far we can see, those who did became some of His loudest advocates, showing the reality of the

resurrection. It was not simply Jesus' followers making up a story to cope with His unexpected death. Paul, for example, gave up a position of power and popularity among the Jews, for a life of persecution, imprisonment and, ultimately, martyrdom. Why? He had seen and heard the risen Lord. He knew absolutely that Jesus had risen, and, thus, all He claimed was true. He was God's only Son, and our Saviour.

Paul challenges the Corinthians to validate what he was writing by speaking to those witnesses who were still alive. If there was any doubt in his mind regarding the reality of Christ's resurrection, he would not have done this. But he knew that they would back up his statement: Christ is risen!

Another proof of Christ's resurrection is seen in the way the various records have been written. For example, the Gospels contain several stories which would have been embarrassing for the disciples. If the resurrection were a fictional story, why would the disciples have included their disbelief at the women's initial claim that Christ was risen, Luke 24. 11, or Thomas' doubts, John 20. 25? Their inclusion is additional evidence that the Gospels are accurate, historical accounts.

A further piece of evidence is found in the fact that the first witnesses recorded in the Gospels were women. In the First Century a woman's witness was not seen as valid in a Jewish court. Why, then, would the writers of the Gospels insist that the first witnesses were women, unless that is what really happened?

In summary, we know the gospel is true because the Lord rose from the dead. The evidence for this is found in over 500 witnesses. He was seen in different places, at different times, by followers and opponents. He walked, talked and ate with them. They knew the truth, and they gave their lives because they believed that He was truly raised from the dead. The writers, who wrote the Gospels, did not give a one-sided, biased account. Rather, they told what happened, 'warts and all'. Jesus was risen from the dead, and they had seen Him!