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# **E**ditorial

Here we are in a New Year. Doesn't time fly! What are your plans for 2016? Have you decided that this year will be different! Maybe you want to grow spiritually and make further progress as a Christian. That's a great ambition. How are you going to go about it?



Personally, I think it's all about developing habits. Good habits help me as a believer and bad habits or a lazy attitude to my Christian life have a detrimental effect on my walk with God.

Listen to the words of the apostle Paul, 'this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things that are before', Phil. 3. 13. We can see the focus and drive of this man as he expresses his desire to make progress as a believer.

It would be good if we focused, this year, on developing habits that help us walk closer to God. It is good for believers to be diligent and purposeful!

To change the subject, let me tell you about some of the articles in this issue. We have a couple of new writers to introduce to you. Andrew Robertson is a Bible teacher and evangelist from Chatham, Ontario in Canada. He is starting a series on Ephesians 6 about the protection that God provides for his people. Alan Affleck is a teacher who lives in the north of Scotland and has written the first of a short series of articles. They are all about biblical descriptions that are used to explain what God's word can do for us. Jeremy Singer continues to work his way through the Acts of the Apostles, we visit Corinth this time and, as always, Michael Buckeridge is guaranteed to make you think.

If you have time to give us some feedback through our Facebook page or by e-mail (stepcar61@gmail.com) please do. We would love to hear from you.

I'll leave you to read! Stephen

**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.

# ADVENTURES IN ACTS Acts 18 - Paul at Corinth

#### BY JEREMY SINGER BRIDGE OF WEIR, SCOTLAND

The map of Greece, like that of Scotland, has a lovely hourglass shape. Corinth was located precisely at the thin neck of the Greek hourglass, making the city a cosmopolitan centre for both people and their philosophies. In Acts chapter 18, we discover what happened when Paul arrived at Corinth with 'the preaching of the cross', 1 Cor. 1. 18.

# Culture

Can the gospel message prosper in a godless culture? The answer from Corinth is a resounding yes! Paul spent at least eighteen months in this ancient city, Acts 18. 11. Classical Corinth had a reputation for drunkenness. BARCLAY<sup>1</sup> cites Aelian, the Greek dramatist, when he writes, 'If ever a Corinthian was shown upon the stage in a Greek play, he was shown drunk'. The city's other claim to fame was its temple to Aphrodite, the pagan goddess of love. In classical Greek thought, as much as today, love can mean mere lust, leading to sexual immorality and perversion. The Christian conception of love is entirely different, 1 Cor. 13.

## Colleagues

Upon his arrival in Corinth, Paul encountered two colleagues: Aquila and Priscilla. These tentmaking partners soon become Paul's friends and supporters in his ministry. Aquila and Priscilla were a well-travelled couple. They are associated with four different places in this chapter alone: Pontus, v. 2, Rome, v. 2, Corinth, v. 1, and Ephesus, v. 19. The topsy-turvy Roman Empire, like today's society, meant people often had to move from one region to another. However, the consistency of this pair is remarkable. Wherever we find them in the New Testament, they are named together as a couple – an inseparable 'item'. They are a tremendous example to husbands and wives setting up homes today. In their partnership, they were ready to support evangelism, Bible teaching, and church fellowship. They had their priorities right, willing to make sacrifices for Christ's sake, Rom. 16. 4.

## Converts

Souls were saved, just a few at first, but later 'many', v. 8. All had the same basic experience, v. 8: first, they heard, then they believed, then they were baptized. This is the same sequence that followed Peter's original gospel message on the day of Pentecost, Acts 2. 41. Paul, naturally, preached the same message at Corinth as elsewhere, 1 Cor. 15. 1. However, in Corinth there were great results, which is not the case everywhere. Why is there such variability? We might ask the same question in our local circumstances. Ultimately, we must trust in the sovereignty of God. The great encouragement from Corinth is that God can shine light in the darkest environment, 2 Cor. 4. 6.

## Command

Paul received a 'vision' one night, v. 9. Nocturnal communications from God to Paul were not uncommon, e.g., Acts 16. 9; 27. 23. When he went to bed, Paul certainly did not waste time counting sheep – instead, he spoke with his COS Shepherd. The Lord's command had three parts: *mentally*, Paul was not to be afraid; *verbally*, Paul

was to speak up; *physically*, Paul was not to hold back. His evangelism had power, given this direct assurance from God. Paul was promised divine presence and protection, v. 10. Further, he was given insight into God's purpose: 'I have much people in this city'. This seemed to indicate God's election, rather than His foreknowledge. The Corinthian converts were 'chosen' by God, 1 Cor. 1. 27-28.

# Conflict

As usual, opposition followed blessing. The Jews evicted Paul from the synagogue early on, v. 6. This did not deter Paul from persistent evangelism for eighteen months, v. 11. Eventually, the Jews brought Paul before the local government official, v. 12. Gallio rightly decided that the complaint had no substance and dismissed it, v. 15. In common with other 'mighty' and 'noble' people, 1 Cor. 1. 26, Gallio appeared to be apathetic with regard to the gospel. However, Paul was not discouraged nor dissuaded from continuing the work, v. 18. After a brief visit to Ephesus, v. 19, Paul returned to Antioch, v. 22. This was the conclusion of his second missionary journey.

# Correspondence

The young assembly at Corinth was never far from Paul's heart or his prayers, 1 Cor. 1. 4. Over subsequent months and years, he wrote a series of letters to the local church at Corinth. He corrected failings, answered questions, taught new truth, and reminded them of things they heard during his original visit. Paul's primary concern for the Corinthians was that he did not want them to be 'ignorant', 12. 1. How do we avoid spiritual ignorance today? We need to be engaged in careful Bible reading, supported by regular, systematic instruction from gifted and reliable teachers. But more of this next time, when we travel with Paul on a return visit to Ephesus.

<sup>1.</sup> WILLIAM BARCLAY, *The Letters to the Corinthians*, St Andrew Press, 1954.

# Thoughts about Thinking

# BY MICHAEL BUCKERIDGE GRANTHAM, ENGLAND

'It is a truth universally acknowledged'. So begins a well-known British novel but here's the question: Is it possible to have universally acknowledged truth in societies where there are a multitude of different cultures and where people have different beliefs? To put it simply, is it possible to know and hold the truth of the gospel in a multicultural society?

What is multiculturalism – Is it about policy or politics?

# The Definitions

One writer has defined *multiculturalism* as an expression of both 'a will to difference and a will to sameness'.

**Multiculturalism and government policy** – this is the desire of government to put in place certain measures to deal with the differences between people in society. **The politics of multiculturalism** – strategies that minority groups use to resist those state policies. In effect, this is the way people behave to ensure society recognizes their right to be different.<sup>1</sup>

# The Discussion

There have always been cultures that live in the same place,<sup>2</sup> and traditionally they would have been linked to nationality. During the 1950s' civil rights movement, however, Martin Luther King demanded equality based on the fact that, under the colour of our skin, we are all the same. As the 1960s came, there was a reaction to that 'equality on the basis of sameness' and groups began talking of their right to have a slice of power without having to assimilate into the 'dominant' culture. They argued that what they did, how they dressed, how they spoke, etc., was a part of their culture and they had as much right to express that as others did as this was part of their identity - who they were. As migration into western countries arew through the 1960s, multiculturalism became associated with the need to show respect for those groups that were arriving. As many of those arriving were from Asia, religion was a central part of their cultural identity, and so the multicultural melting pot received an addition that was unexpected and, in many ways, unwelcome.<sup>3</sup>

# The challenge of multiculturalism -Can your beliefs be public or must they remain private?

If there are differences in society then we are going to have to put up with things that we don't agree with. In a word, we are called to exercise 'tolerance'. This traditional definition left room to still respect and value those with whom we disagreed, but 'the definition of new tolerance is that every individual's beliefs, values, lifestyle, and perception of truth . . . are equal; . . . there is no hierarchy of truth. Your beliefs and my beliefs are equal, and all truth is relative'.4

Long ago, Pilate asked, 'What is truth?', and then turned away from the Lord Jesus, before an answer could be given. Jesus claimed not just to tell the truth but to *be* 'the Truth'. How sad that, due to political pressure, those in authority were willing to put 'the Truth' to death. Today, we live in a climate where the pressure is on to privatize 'exclusive' faith claims. However, the word of God has a twofold exhortation:

- 'Be ready to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason for the hope that is within you', 1 Pet. 3. 15. Notice that the verse begins with complete submission to the Lordship of Christ and ends with the attitude in which we should speak, i.e., meekness and fear. Such readiness will require two things: to know and live the truth, and also to be willing to suffer for it.
- 2. 'Love your neighbour as yourself', Matt. 19. 19. Love is the opposite of tolerance and we are commanded to love. Tolerance says, 'you must agree with me'. Love responds, 'I must do something harder; I will tell you the truth because I am convinced that, "the truth will set you free"'. Tolerance says, 'You must allow me to have my way'. Love responds, 'I must do something harder; I will plead with you to follow the right way because I believe you are worth the risk'. Tolerance seeks to be inoffensive; love takes risks. Tolerance is indifferent; love is active. Tolerance costs nothing; love costs everything.<sup>5</sup>

Are we willing to humbly stand for the truth and actively demonstrate the love of God, knowing that we may have to endure suffering for Christ's sake?<sup>6</sup>

# The opportunity of multiculturalism - heaven on earth?

#### Unity in diversity

'Thou art worthy', sing the twenty-four elders around the heavenly throne, 'for thou hast redeemed us ... out of every kindred, and tongue and people and nation', Rev. 5. 9. Finally, we see a wonderful unity in diversity. The secret? The people are redeemed and reconciled to God. These are people who have experienced the greatest cultural change; once aliens and strangers, they have now been made nigh. But the truth gets even more amazing! Christ shed His blood that He might reconcile both (Jew and Gentile) unto God in one body, Eph. 2. 16. Now, the Church should be a powerful example to the world that true unity among those who are different is possible and stand as testimony to the living power of God in the lives of individuals and communities.

The foundation of that unity is a love that is willing to sacrifice itself for those who are so completely different. It is interesting to note that the truth of the body of Christ in a local sense was revealed to a city church where there was a clash of three major cultures and, just prior to the unfolding of that truth, a 'more excellent way' was described, love, 1 Cor. 13. Paul describes the church as, 'the pillar and ground of the truth', 1 Tim. 3. 15. Part of that truth is surely that our God loves unity? As an increasingly unstable world looks on, may it be that we 'endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace', Eph. 4. 3, and sense the privilege of being part of a unity that only God can produce.

#### Moved to witness

Paul, faced with the culture of Athens, spoke up because he was stirred by the idolatry of the people. A love for the truth and the people combined to make him risk ridicule and wrath in his desire that men might come to 'the knowledge of the truth'. Could it be that God has placed us here at this time to be able to spread the gospel among those who perhaps would never have had the opportunity to hear? Will we thank God for the privilege He has given us and rise to the responsibility placed upon us?

# Confident Conclusion - The truth will set you free

'Truth forever on the scaffold, wrong forever on the throne, Yet that scaffold sways the future, and, behind the dim unknown,

Standeth God within the shadows, keeping watch above his own'.<sup>7</sup>

They tried to put 'the Truth' to death; they thought they could keep Him in the tomb, but today the Truth is at the right hand of God. One day the world will see Him who is called 'Faithful and True' riding out to victory to take His rightful place as King of kings and Lord of lords. 'Rejoice', says Peter, 'inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy', 1 Pet. 4. 13.

## Notes

- <sup>1.</sup> Summarized from: *The Cambridge Dictionary of Sociology*, pp. 407-8.
- <sup>2.</sup> Culture: Has numerous definitions see CLIFFORD GEERTZ, quoted in *Christ and Culture Revisited*, D. CARSON, pg. 2.
- <sup>3.</sup> Summarized from: <u>http://www.open.edu/openlearn/</u> <u>history-the-arts/multiculturalism-bites</u>.
- <sup>4.</sup> T. HELMBOCK quoted in *The New Tolerance*, J. MCDOWELL and B. HOSTETLER, pg. 19.
- <sup>5.</sup> Ibid, pg. 95.
- <sup>6</sup> Many examples are given of the effects of the 'new tolerance' on believers in different walks of life. See the book *The New Tolerance* detailed above.
- <sup>7.</sup> Poem: JAMES LOWELL, The Present Crisis.

# Water For Cleaning

### BY ALAN AFFLECK LOSSIEMOUTH, SCOTLAND

Unless otherwise stated, Bible quotations are from the NKJV.

The question 'Have you brushed your teeth?' is one my youngest son often hears. He is still at an age when he sometimes forgets! You get the impression that getting washed is something to be avoided, if at all possible, when you hear the complaint 'I had a bath two days ago, do I NEED to get washed?' Probably most of us went through the stage where getting washed seemed so pointless.

THE BIBLE

# Do I need to be washed?

Peter asks Jesus a similar question in John chapter 13. He watches as the Lord rises from supper, wraps an apron around his waist and fills the basin with water. It must have been clear what Jesus intended to do, but neither Peter nor any of the other disciples protested. The Lord begins to wash the disciples' feet, but Peter doesn't offer to take over. So when he objects to the Lord washing his feet, the only alternative is that his feet remain unwashed. Christ replies, 'If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me'. He demonstrates how important cleanliness is for the Christian. It's not that Christ is making a point about personal hygiene; remember, he previously defended the disciples when the Pharisees criticized them for eating without washing their hands, Mark 7. 6-9. He is referring to a need to be spiritually clean.

# Can I be washed fully?

This was Peter's conclusion, 'Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!' He is reminded that he has been washed previously and is still therefore clean, only his feet, having come into contact with the dusty Judean roads, require cleansing. Similarly, as Christians, we have been spiritually washed. Paul writing to the Corinthians identifies a group of sinners and states 'such were some of you. But you were washed'. 1 Cor. 6. 11. This was a once for all event! The Christian does not need to be saved again and again, but our minds, when coming into contact with this world, require to be cleansed regularly from its influences, Eph. 4. 23. We live our lives surrounded by sin and attitudes that are contrary to the mind of God. This could be in our workplace, when shopping, or reading a daily newspaper, and the only way to remain pure in this environment is by the word of God. The Ephesian Epistle tells us that 'Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for her; that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word', Eph. 5. 25-26. In the Psalms we are also given similar advice, 'How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word', Ps. 119. 9.

# How often should I wash?

As children, getting washed was probably a low priority. We were taught by our parents to make it a habit, and we began to wash at regular points in the day without much thought. It had become part of our lifestyle! Habits are easier to form when young, Prov. 22. 6, so it is essential that Christian young people make this spiritual cleansing part of their daily routine. There might be days when we don't feel like it or believe we do not have time, but breaking our habit will make us akin to a person who will only wash if he has nothing else to do.

# How can I wash?

Practically, there are many ways for a believer to make the Bible part of their daily life. There may be particular times of the day in which opportunities to read can be guaranteed; first thing in the morning or before going to bed, as in the case of physical washing; or during our lunch at work or college. Many Christians use a daily reading book, or follow a Bible reading plan. Bible teaching can be downloaded from the internet to listen to on your daily commute, or you could follow reputable Bible teachers on social media.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1.</sup> Editor's note – ask advice from your elders if you are downloading Bible teaching as not everything on the internet will be good for you.

# Why is washing important?

When God gave instructions to Moses regarding the tabernacle, He required that a basin of water be placed between the tent of meeting and the altar. In the KJV the basin is called the 'laver'. This was used by the priests to wash before entering the tent of meeting or approaching the altar, Exod. 40. 32. This teaches us that in order to approach God's presence, or be useful to Him in service, we must first be cleansed.

'So David arose from the ground, washed and anointed himself, and changed his clothes; and he went into the house of the Lord and worshipped', 2 Sam. 12. 20.

#### STANDING TALL

# An introduction to the armour of God, Eph. 6. 10-13

## BY ANDREW ROBERTSON CHATHAM, ONTARIO, CANADA

Unless otherwise stated, all quotations are taken from the NKJV

It is time for a reality check. Time to face the fact that, for the Christian, the world is in a state of war! The sun may be shining and the birds may be chirping. You may think that you live in a land of peace. But this is not peacetime; it is wartime. And you, as a Christian, are not merely a spectator. You are a soldier enlisted in an army and stationed behind enemy lines. You have a mission to complete in enemy territory, surrounded by hostile forces. For the Christian, it has always been this way. It was this way for Christians in 1st century Ephesus. It hasn't changed for Christians in the 21st century. And the sooner we face it, the more successful we will be in the battle.

Paul gave this reality check to the Christians in Ephesus. He was in jail and they were losing heart. Being a Christian wasn't an easy life. In fact, being a Christian was extremely painful. Their environment was affecting these people! They were constantly surrounded by people and circumstances that were against them! They were seeking to do what was right, and were being punished for it! Over time this can be wearing! They didn't seem to understand the reason for their suffering, or the point of it. So Paul makes this request of them:

'Therefore I ask that **you do not lose heart** at my tribulations for you, which is your glory', Eph. 3.13.

Have you had anything go wrong in your Christian life? Have you found that it is not easy or popular at school or university to be a Christian? Then you are not alone. This is normal for all Christians at all times. And the reason is simple: we are at war! Pain and conflict are normal in wartime. Paul wants us to know that there is only one way to stay in the fight. We must 'be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might', Eph. 6. 10, because we cannot survive in our own strength. Paul was chained between two Roman soldiers while in prison. He would have had a lot of time to compare the soldier's armour with God's equipment for the Christians in Ephesus. Being strong in the Lord is like arming ourselves for battle. Instead of losing heart and giving up, we need to face the reality of battle, put on the armour and take our stand against the enemy.

But why does it have to be the armour of God? Why can't I use my own armour? Isn't it good enough? Can't I use my own wisdom and charm to say the right things? Don't I have enough courage already? Can't I figure out how to fight through the struggles with my own positive attitude? In a word: NO! The same gospel that exposes our helplessness to be forgiven also teaches us how helpless we are to be victorious. God must save us, and God must keep us. At no time can we leave the gospel behind and get back to handling things by ourselves. This is a dangerous battle, and we have a deadly enemy. God Himself must provide the armour we need in order to survive. And that's the ongoing glory of the gospel: God doesn't just save us in a once-forall moment of time, but, in Christ, He continues to provide all we need for daily victory.

Paul is deadly serious about making use of the armour. Armour is not optional for a soldier! Neither is living in 'the strength of the Lord and in the power of His might' optional for the Christian. God's armour is a basic necessity and we cannot afford to neglect it.

When we forget we are soldiers behind enemy lines we will forget we need this armour. It is also possible to ignore our need for armour because we have underestimated our enemy. He is far more cunning and powerful than we think, and He doesn't give up easily! We are also far more helpless than we realize! Paul describes all the devil's strengths in plural terms, because his army is great and his tactics are varied. The 'spiritual hosts of wickedness' are great in their strength and power. They lurk in every shadow. They are both in our world and also occupy 'heavenly places'. They are not 'flesh and blood' and, therefore, are not limited by human strengths or weaknesses. We hardly recognize them as the true enemy behind our pain and temptations. We rarely think about the size of their strength, or tremble at the thought of their terror.

But we are told to stand 'against' the enemy. Paul repeats the word 'against' five times in verse 12. He is making a crucial point here – we not only *must* stand against the armies of darkness, but we *can* stand against them with the proper armour. This is where God's provision meets us in our warfare against the powers of darkness. God has provided a piece of armour to equip us against the 'wiles of the devil'! The devil may be able to outsmart our limited minds, but he cannot outsmart an allknowing and all-wise God!

God has provided this armour for us by the conquering work of His Son on the cross. Paul could have been thinking about Isaiah's picture of the Messiah as a mighty warrior dressed in armour, Isa. 59. The Lord Jesus fought and won the battle for us and now He dresses us to stand in battle. He doesn't merely give us the armour we need, but He Himself is the armour that we need. It is only in His strength that we can stand against such a terrifying enemy.

Although the armour is prepared and provided, we still must take it up and put it on. The focus is not only upon protecting our physical body but also our minds from attack. We 'put on the Lord Jesus Christ' when we immerse ourselves in His word – the Bible. Paul uses each piece of the Roman armour to refer to different ways we can use scripture to guard our hearts and minds from the enemy. It is through the Holy Scriptures that we see Jesus Christ for who He really is. It is only when we live in His presence and might that we are truly safe.

Arm yourself with Jesus who is your Saviour and Lord! Live in His strength and power! With Him, you will be able to stand tall against anything the enemy may throw at you.