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All articles written by the Editor unless otherwise specified

YPS

(Young Precious Seed) is a supplement of *Precious Seed* 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.

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The Dustbin Lid by Michael Penfold

The British TV series *Dixon of Dock Green* ran for an amazing twenty-five years. In 1990, the atheistic playwright behind it, 'Ted' Willis, moved an amendment to the Broadcasting Bill, hoping to pave the way for the presentation of humanism on religious programmes alongside Christianity. Explaining his motives to a Committee in the House of Lords, Baron Willis confessed, 'I am a total non-believer. I do not apologise to the Committee for that. I was brought up as a primitive Methodist. I do not think they exist any more. If one sat in chapel on a cushion that was a great sin. I lost my faith when I was fourteen. I went to the bottom of the garden and said, "If there is a God, please lift that dustbin lid. Let that dustbin lid rise and that will prove him to me". I am sure that we have all done that at some time or another. Of course God ignored me and the dustbin lid did not rise.' Baron Willis proceeded to expand in greater detail on his other objections to God, but clearly his atheism commenced at the bottom of his garden, waiting for a dustbin lid to rise. So why did God not answer his prayer?



An analogy might help. Picture the following scene. The morning of their fiftieth wedding anniversary Mary enters the kitchen only to find her husband John holding up a playing hoop. After secretly entertaining doubts about his wife's devotion to him for some time he asks, 'Do you really love me?' Somewhat taken aback Mary replies, 'What do you mean John? Of course I do.'

'Well, if you really love me, I want you to jump through this hoop.' Mary's mind begins to spin. John's facial expression makes it clear he isn't joking. Confused and indignant Mary runs from the kitchen in tears saying to herself, 'If he doesn't know I love him after all these years, I'm certainly not going to jump through any hoops for him.'

Lord Willis' dustbin lid failed to rise for the same reason that Mary refused to jump through the hoop. As Mary's fifty years of devotion had

Applying the Scriptures by Andrew Wilson (3)

There are two dangerous extremes in Bible reading. The first is to study the Bible academically as if it consisted only of ideas to be understood. The second is to read the Bible impressionistically as if it consisted only of isolated Christian life-tips.

Some Christians almost deny that God speaks to people today. They poke fun at the idea of God using the Bible as a guide book for life. They tell jokes like the one about the lady who would pray for guidance as to which sock to put on first. Another joke concerns a man seeking guidance from the Bible who opened it at random and read, 'Judas went out and hanged himself'. Flipping quickly to another page, he read, 'Go and do thou likewise'. In desperation he turned to another page, only to read, 'That thou doest, do quickly'.

However amusing such arguments are, we need to understand that when we read the Bible, it is not a case of us examining it. Rather, it is really the Bible that is examining our lives. The Bible is God's word – it speaks to us. How do we hear the Bible's message for our lives today?

of ripping sentences out of their context. Does 1 Corinthians 3.16 ('You are the temple of God . . . the Spirit of God dwells in you') teach that Christians should not smoke? No. This verse refers to the church at Corinth rather than to individual Christians. The context is the seriousness of dividing the church. A preacher wanting to inveigh against smoking would be on safer ground quoting the similar verse in 1 Corinthians 6. 19 where the context is clearly that of the believer's body.

Take another example: Galatians 3. 28. This verse is applied by some to argue that, in Christ, men and women are equal and therefore women can do what men do for Christ. This verse does indeed use very gender-inclusive language, but it is not writing about service for Christ. The context is about salvation. The lesson is that all can be saved.

We must also realize that not everything in the Bible applies to us today. The progressive nature of scriptural revelation means that certain truths and commands applied only at certain stages of God's revelation. We are no longer under the Old Testament law. We cannot have the Holy Spirit taken away from us, Ps. 51. 11. Neither are we under the food prohibitions, Col. 2. 16, nor do we use imprecatory prayers, Rom. 12. 14, nor is our gospel anymore restricted to Jews, Matt. 10. 5.

The Point of the Passage

One important question we need to ask as we read the Bible is, 'Why did the author write this?' Why did Paul write Romans 6. 23? Was it so that people would get saved? No. In Romans chapter 6 Paul writes about the change in lifestyle of a Christian – we are not to continue in sin. In verses 12-23 the Christian is pictured as being in new

Obviously, if there is a command that applies to us, we should obey it. If there is a promise, we should take it to heart and if there is a rebuke we should take heed. We should follow the good examples we see in scripture.

Applying in Context

However, we must be aware of the danger



employment and contrasts are drawn between the old and new employers, contracts, products and wages. Verse 23 is primarily a warning to professing Christians that, if there is no evidence of repentance, then they are not saved at all. They are still serving the old boss, sin – and beware: his wage is death.

What is the point of John 4? Is John here showing us from the Lord's example how we, too, can be successful personal evangelists? Or is this passage teaching us something about the reception of adulteresses into the church? No. John's main point – as seen by placing this incident after Christ's conversation with Nicodemus – is the fact that Christ came to be the Saviour of all, even adulterous Samaritan women. Other applications might have some validity, but the primary application is a gospel one. Context often helps determine the main point.

General and Specific Applications

Behind many specific applications lie general principles. Therefore, even though I do not possess certain gifts of the Spirit, I may still apply 1 Corinthians 14 to myself by striving to edify the church rather than showing off my spirituality.

The question of cultural relevance arises here. Some argue that certain scriptures only applied to a first-century context – alleged examples include foot-washing, shaking dust from feet at unbelievers and holy kisses. Therefore, they say, we need only adopt the general principle. Space forbids examination of individual examples, each of which is quite different. Generally speaking, however, by comparison with the Old Testament, the New Testament is not culture-

bound. It calls upon us to be counter-cultural by obeying God's word.

The Peter Principle

God's will for our lives not only involves general directives (e.g., holiness, thankfulness, 1 Thess. 4. 3; 5. 18) but also at times specific guidance, e.g., Ps. 73. 24; Rom 1. 10; 1 Cor. 1. 1.

God is hardly going to guide us in relation to life decisions if we are disobedient to His word. Nevertheless, God still guides us today. On a number of occasions when God guided Peter, He repeated the guidance three times. He did this when giving Peter the vision of the descending sheet, the cock crowing and His restoration of Peter with the words, 'Do you love me?' Therefore, we need to avoid drawing hasty conclusions about guidance from God's word, but instead wait prayerfully upon God for further repeated confirmation that it is indeed His voice we are hearing and not simply our own. Reading God's word carefully, consistently and consecutively is the best safeguard against foolish ideas such as going out like Judas to hang oneself!

Quick quiz

- Should we have a 'theme' in the Breaking of Bread?
- Who or what is the restrainer in 2 Thessalonians 2?
- Why are there harps in heaven?



Your God is too small! Essential truths

Is God ever unfair?

'That's not fair!' is an expression we expect to hear from little children, but is surprisingly often heard from adults as well. Mankind seems to have a standard of behaviour by which it judges whether something is fair or not. This assessment of the justice or fairness of something is made about our behaviour to one another, but it is also made about God's behaviour. Asaph was bothered by what seemed to be unfairness in the way wicked, immoral, unscrupulous people seem to prosper in life and in business. They bend if not break rules, they exploit other people, and God appears to turn a blind eye to it all. 'That's not fair! That's wrong,' is the implied charge against God, Ps. 73. 'There's no justice in this world.'

God defines what is right/fair

But how do we distinguish between 'right and wrong' in this context? By what standard is something right or wrong? The standard for right or wrong is God's unwavering righteousness, not man's changing standards and opinions, and God's dealings with men are just when He deals with them according to His righteousness. God says, 'I the Lord speak righteousness, I

declare things that are right', Isa. 45. 19. 'The precepts of the Lord are right', Ps. 19. 8. Our Lord, speaking of Himself, once said, 'My judgment is just', John 5. 30. We cannot decide what is right, wrong, fair, or unfair because, in the first place, our judgement is tainted by sin and, secondly, we don't see the full picture. This is what reassured Asaph in the end. He did not understand things

fully 'until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I', Ps. 73. 17.

God is righteous and just

In our English translation of the Bible we come across the words 'righteousness' and 'justice'. These are not two separate concepts in the Hebrew or Greek in which the Bible was written. They are used to translate the same word - *tsedek* in the Old Testament Hebrew and *dikaiois* in New Testament Greek. These two terms really describe the same aspect of God's character. God's righteousness is the way in which He carries out His holy and perfect way. He does so with perfect justice. 'As for God, His way is perfect.' It cannot be anything else. This means He will always act in accordance with what is right. He will never be like those men whom He promises to punish who 'call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness: that put bitter for sweet; and sweet for bitter', Isa. 5. 20. To do that would be wrong; it would be unjust.

Because He is holy, God can neither sin nor take pleasure in sin, nor can He condone and excuse it. Being just, He must punish sin and reward good. He cannot do otherwise. 'There is no God else beside me', He says, 'a just God and a Saviour', Isa. 45. 21. Abraham wrestled with the thought that God could destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. It was not that the wicked in those cities did not deserve God's judgement; Abraham knew that they did. He struggled with what he saw to be unjust if God destroyed the righteous at the same time as the unrighteous, saying, 'Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?' Gen. 18. 25. Of course He shall. He is 'a just God and a Saviour', Isa. 45. 21. He is 'the just Lord', Zeph. 3. 5, 'faithful and just', 1 John 1. 9. 'Great and marvellous



s about the attributes of God



are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways', Rev. 15. 3. Speaking of the Lord Jesus, the Old Testament describes Him coming into Jerusalem on a donkey and says, 'He is just, and having salvation', Zech. 9. 9. The Jewish people of His day 'denied the Holy One and the just', Acts 3. 14. God is 'the just Lord in the midst thereof; he will not do iniquity: every morning doth he bring his judgment to light, he faileth not', Zeph. 3. 5.

God is impartial

God has no favourites when it comes to excusing sinful behaviour. 'He that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons', Col. 3. 25. 'There is no respect for persons with God. For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law', Rom 2. 11-12. 'Let the fear of the Lord be upon you', says Jehoshaphat to his judges, 'for there is no iniquity with the Lord our God, nor respect of persons, nor taking of gifts (bribery)', 2 Chr. 19. 7. God frequently rebuked kings of Israel and judges amongst them for their injustice and unrighteous dealings with one another. He did not excuse them, saying, 'They are my people'. In fact, God's standards for His people are higher, simply because they should know better. Judgement must begin at the house of the Lord. Paul writes to Christian slave owners and says, 'Ye masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening: knowing that your Master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him', Eph. 6. 9. In other words, God's standard of behaviour is the same for rich and poor, slave and free. In the end, God 'without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work', 1 Pet. 1. 17. God, therefore, commands 'all men everywhere to repent: because he hath appointed a day, in

the which he will judge the world ... by that man whom he hath ordained', Acts 17. 30, 31. God 'is the judge of all', Heb. 12. 23.

God must punish sin

Many say that, because God is a God of love, He will not ultimately send anyone to hell. Yet no attribute of God's character, no part of His make-up, should ever be emphasized above another. All of God's attributes are held in equal tension. So though it is true to say 'God is love', He is also just and righteous. He must punish sin – were He to fail to do so He would not be just. So He will 'by no means clear the guilty', Exod. 34. 7; cf. 23. 7. Although it may be true to say it is God's wrath or anger that will bring judgement, His wrath is brought into play because of His offended righteousness. Men and women are warned not to despise the longsuffering of God, lest they treasure up against them 'wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God who will render to every man according to his deeds', Rom. 2. 5-6. On the other hand, a just God must and will reward good, Ps. 17. 1.

Objection 1: How, and why, can God forgive anyone, without overlooking their sin?

How can God 'be just' and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus?' Rom. 3. 26. Simply because God has found a way by which He can resolve the conflict between the necessity of punishing sin and sinners because of His justice and His desire to forgive and save sinners as a result of His love. He did this by sending His Son into the world to become a substitute for sinners. When Christ died upon the cross, God 'made him to be sin ... who knew no sin.' Those who have believed and trusted in Christ can say 'the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.'

Is God ever unfair?

Believers can say, 'He bare our sin in his own body on the tree.' So God can forgive sinners their sins, not because He has overlooked their sins but because He has already judged their sins, and another has already borne the punishment for sins. 'Christ has suffered, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God.' So God can be just, and still forgive sinners.

Objection 2: Is there not unfairness with God if He does not forgive and save all?

That He could is without doubt. Why does He not do so? The first answer to this is to remind ourselves that God does not owe anyone anything. He does not owe it to any sinner to save and forgive him or her. Our sins merit God's judgement, not His forgiveness. If God sent the whole world, every single person, to judgement because of their sins, no-one could say God was either unjust or unfair. Yet, for some reason or other, He chooses to save some, and leave others to their just condemnation.

But what are we to say about that? Isn't God unfair in saving some and not saving others? No. If God chooses to save some out of 'the good pleasure of his will' that is His prerogative. He does not owe it to all to save them, therefore He is not unfair if He does not do so. He has chosen some to be saved, and left the others to their just deserts.

You may say, that is unfair. Surprisingly enough, the argument is not new. When Paul taught God's sovereign choice in the election of the nation of Israel, and from there God's sovereign right to save whom He will today, people objected. 'What

shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy', Rom. 9. 14-16. In fact, the Spirit of God reminds us that it is not for us to sit in judgement upon God. The only answer to questions about the fairness of God is simply this, 'Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?' Rom. 9. 20. Job tried to question God, too, and this was God's response to him, 'Shall he that contendeth with the Almighty instruct him?' Job 40. 2-4. In the end, with questions such as these, we have to rest simply on this assurance, 'Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?' His thoughts are not our thoughts, neither are His ways our ways, Isa. 55. 8. A just God cannot do anything that is unjust, though we may not see it yet. 'Shall mortal man be more just than God? shall a man be more pure than his maker?', Job 4. 17. We need to go back into that sanctuary, Ps. 73.

What of us?

If God is righteous and just, and we are His children, should we not be like Him? 'If ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin', Jas. 2. 9. 'Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish judgment in the gate', Amos 5. 15. 'If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him', 1. Johnn 2. 29. 'Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous', 1. John. 3. 7. Good and upright is He; so should we be.

GOD IS JUST



...Continued from Page 1

unequivocally proved her love to John, so God had provided the young Willis with unmistakable evidence of His existence, if only he had eyes to see.

General Revelation

Start with nature. From the gigantic universe down to microscopic DNA, all of nature loudly proclaims the existence of God. The stars daily speak of a God who may be discerned through what He has created, Ps. 19. 2. God's 'general revelation' through *nature alone* leaves every single human being *without excuse*, Rom. 1. 20 – so much so that, to avoid the obvious, atheists must live in denial. Co-discoverer of DNA, Sir Francis Crick, warns his fellows, 'Biologists must constantly keep in mind that what they see was not designed, but rather evolved.'¹ Staring intelligent design in the face, most atheists have become skilled at shutting off the voice of creation and explaining away the obvious.

Written Revelation

Then there's the Bible. Given by inspiration of God, the Bible is a truly miraculous book. Its accuracy when touching on scientific, medical and historical facts is legendary. Its harmony, despite being written by approximately forty authors over 1,500 years is striking. Most impressive are its prophecies of future events. Before His birth, the Bible predicted that Christ would be born in Bethlehem, would have his hands and feet pierced, would be sold for thirty pieces of silver and would appear to Israel (riding on a donkey) exactly 483 years to the day from Artaxerxes' decree to rebuild Jerusalem. Each new prediction recorded in the Old Testament hikes up the probability numbers to staggering



proportions. Taking eight prophecies, Professor Peter Stoner calculated, 'We find the chance that any man might have lived to the present time and fulfilled all eight prophecies is 1 in 10^{17} . . . that would be 1 in 100,000,000,000,000,000'. Yet, dozens of such prophecies were fulfilled in the person of Christ, some while He was still in Mary's womb and others while He hung lifeless on the cross. What more evidence could anyone want? Truly, if people will not believe the Bible, even a miracle will not convince them, Luke 16. 31.

Incarnate Revelation

As if all this evidence were not enough, God has spoken again in Jesus Christ, His final word to humanity, Heb. 1. 1-2. Nothing more needs to be said. With creation on show through microscope and telescope, and with the Bible's supernatural nature proved beyond reasonable doubt to the honest enquirer, God has now given His crowning revelation. He has spoken in His Son. The virgin birth, sinless life, unique speech, atoning death and miraculous bodily resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth are the ultimate voice from God to humanity. Any who choose to reject the Son, reject the Father who sent Him.

The dustbin lid is not going to move. It doesn't need to.

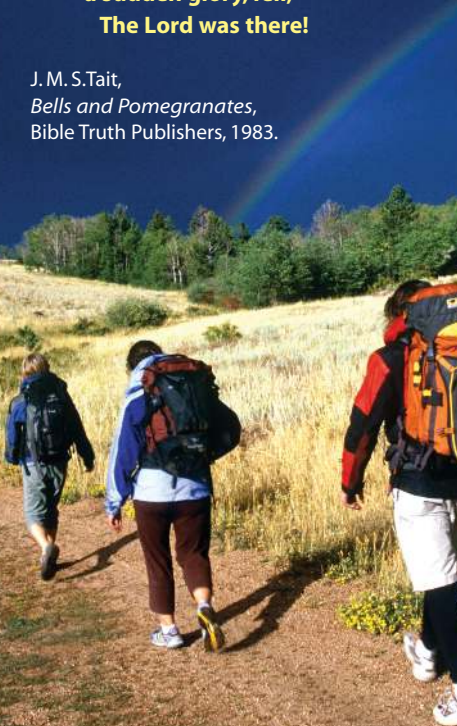
Christian poetry can be something of a mixed bag: though the themes are often uplifting, the poetry itself can be poor, seldom scanning or rhyming well. Here is a little poem that takes as its departure point the experience of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, and offers the same to us. See what you make of it.

Jehovah Shammah

*In the way
In the breaking of bread
In the midst, Luke 24. 35-36*

**I walked abroad,
and on Life's toilsome way
He met me there.
In home's sweet peace
my hearth at close of day
He came to share.
I sought His own,
of Him to hear and tell
In converse rare;
When lo! a hush,
a sudden glory, fell;
The Lord was there!**

J. M. S. Tait,
Bells and Pomegranates,
Bible Truth Publishers, 1983.



Ancient Wisdom for a Modern World

**Wise words from the
book of Proverbs**



**He that is surety for a
stranger shall smart for it, Prov. 11. 15.**

A friend of mine, with his wife, moved to Bath a while ago. John had emigrated from Botswana to the UK to read for a post-graduate degree in Bath University. He had been a primary school teacher for several years, and had taught our children when we were resident in Botswana. His wife is a qualified pharmacist, who had run single-handedly a pharmacy in Francistown. Both were mature, had been married to each other for twenty years and had put aside money to fund John's post-graduate degree.

Given, then, that they were a mature, professional couple, who intended to settle in Bath for post-graduate studies and had funds available, one could be forgiven for thinking that finding a flat would not be difficult. Try it. Some estate agents would hardly give them the time of day as, wishing to be sensible in their use of funds, they did not want to rent a sumptuous apartment. Others refused even to consider them as John was a student and, 'We don't rent to students', or because they were self-funding and had no guaranteed income. Whatever happened to self-help and independence these days? Happily, one estate agent was willing to rent to them, providing they could get good references.

Was I prepared to give them a reference? Of course I was. I had the highest opinion possible of them and was even prepared to stand surety for them, guaranteeing payment of the rent if necessary. I am sure you would have done the same. To stand surety for a friend is one thing; however, to stand surety for a total stranger is another. Would I give a good reference and be willing to bail out a total stranger should the need arise? Probably not. The proverb above tells us that one who is willing to stand as guarantee for a stranger may get into trouble – may 'smart for it'. We would think twice about that. Yet Christ Himself stood surety for sinners when we were not just strangers to Him, we were even enemies. He suffered on the cross, 'the just for the unjust that he might bring us to God'. He took upon Himself sins He had not committed and bore the punishment for them, so that all who come to Him in repentance and faith might be forgiven and have peace with God. You might say that was foolhardy. He certainly smarted for it, but He did so knowingly and willingly. His death for sinners, rather than showing folly in standing for them, shows His great love, for 'God commendeth his love toward us in that, whilst we were yet sinners, Christ died for us'.

'What love to Thee we owe, our God, for all Thy grace.'