

Scripture Standard

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Pleading for a total return to New Testament principles.

contend earnestly for the faith
Jude 1:3

Who Folded the Head-Kerchief?

John 20:6-7

The Jews said to Pilate, the Roman governor, that He should guard the tomb, since they feared Jesus' disciples might steal the body and claim Jesus had risen from the dead. He gave them permission to use the soldiers he had detailed to the chief priest for controlling unrest during the Passover festival.

The Roman method was to have 6 soldiers, two guarding the tomb, two lying asleep in front of them and two off duty. Alternating every two hours throughout the night. If they let the body be stolen they would be gruesomely executed publicly for dereliction.

During the night an angel rolled the stone away. They were petrified. The tomb was empty.

THERE WAS NOBODY THERE!

Where was Jesus? How did he get out? His grave clothes were lying there and his head-kerchief was neatly folded to one side. The Roman human fighting machines fled. They did not dare to go to Pilate. When they went to the High Priest, he bribed them to broadcast that the disciples had stolen the body, and he would make it right with Pilate.

So what struck me? The folded head-kerchief. Who folded it? Such a simple thing. I had never thought of it before. They would see the stone rolled back and no body in the tomb.

Who folded it? I am staggered. Such a simple thing. I have read the Bible account time and again for over 75 years and I had never thought of it before. I had even studied Frank Morrison's excellent book entitled "Who Moved The Stone?" yet it never struck me, that Jesus came out before the angel moved the stone without disturbing the guards. Amazing.

The Sign over the Cross

Jonathan Ashurst, Lexington, Kentucky

Now Pilate wrote a title and put it on the cross.

And the writing was:

JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS.

Then many of the Jews read this title, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin.

John 19:19-20

Here was a symbol raised up in defiance of Almighty God, just as the tower of Babel had been centuries before. Anything that rebels against God is doomed to fail in its mission. Though intended as a threatening taunt, the sign on the cross foretold Christ's ultimate victory as king.

Genesis 11 tells how the people of ancient Babylon began the construction of a tower in order to demonstrate their perceived self-sufficiency in rebellion against God. When God confused their languages, the plot was abandoned. John 19 relates how the Roman governor Pilate placed a sign over Jesus' cross to explain the cause of the execution. But three days later, Christ rose from the dead. The following chart explores some of the similarities between these two symbols, the Tower of Babel and the sign on the cross:



The Tower of Babel	The Sign on the Cross
Illustrates mankind attempting to reach heaven on our own terms	Illustrates how God has reached down from heaven to us
Man's rebellion graciously thwarted by God	Man's rebellion graciously thwarted by God
Produced as a symbol of pride	Produced as a symbol of shame
One language divided into many	Many languages united into one - the language of love
God divides mankind	God unites mankind
Intended as a taunt to God, but God had the last word	Intended as a taunt to God, but ironically declared his rule
Humanity divided by God	Humanity united by Christ
Humanity pushing away the Lord	The Lord drawing us to himself
It was never finished	"It is finished"

Image from:

http://www.simplychristians.eu/eusebos/printable_files/DOCUMENTS/a%20RghtPat h/a7%20The%20Passion%20of%20the%20Christ.pdf

Are we a New Testament church?

James Lim, Lavender, Singapore

Claim: We are the New Testament church. Really?

A recent survey revealed that the number of church goers in USA has declined annually for the last ten years. The number of people who declare that they do not have a religion, especially the Millennials, is steadily increasing. Why is this so when US churches are richer than congregations in other countries? Should they blame the “customers” for the disinterest or is it that they do not understand the spiritual marketplace and have drawn the wrong crowd? Have they made merchandise out of God’s word in His church?

Like USA, we in Singapore live in a land of plenty. We have religious freedom. Local churches hold events like camps, retreats, revivals, seminars, and workshops in hotels and resorts. We spend a lot for fellowship meals viz., buffets. We fly in American speakers and we believe in hiring full time workers and the need to rent or buy church buildings. We believe we need more professionals and skillful people to use their talents to grow the church. We put a lot of emphasis in Bible study.

Where do we draw our power from? Are poor churches powerless? What if you are poor or/and not smart enough to study? Without the mighty dollar, can a poor assembly of priesthood of believers have access to the Holy Spirit without a clergy of Bible school graduates? We are not growing as fast as the church in Acts. Despite many fellowship activities, some brethren, whilst appearing happy with us during these activities, chose to cry alone. Some of them left us without sharing their reasons.

What was the early church like? Are we even close to their way of life? How did they carry out the Great Commission without having rich resources of the modern church? The early churches were poor and persecuted. There was no religious freedom of modern-day equivalence. The Bible was not completed. The disciples met in homes instead of church buildings as any large gatherings

would have caught the attention of the Roman authorities. Apostles like Paul earned their keep. There were no paid preachers or ministers.

A. Our Master's expectation. Do we really know Him?

a) Who was Jesus' target group mentioned at the start of His ministry? What is ours?

The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to **the poor**; He has sent Me to heal **the brokenhearted**, to proclaim liberty to **the captives** and recovery of sight to **the blind**, to set at liberty those who are **oppressed**; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.

Luke 4:18-19

And He began to say to them, '**Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.**'

Luke 4:21

b) What is His expectation on Judgement Day? Will we be judged as a church or individually?

Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: **'for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.'**

Matthew 25:41-43

c) Emphasis of James the brother of Jesus

Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

James 1:27

d) What does it mean to know God?

"He defended the cause of the poor and needy, and so all went well. **Is that not what it means to know Me?"** declares the LORD.

Jeremiah 22:16

Reflection #1: Are we anywhere near the NT church? I know

the Bible, but do I know Him? Is caring for the needy a way of life or just another church programme for us? I am participative in church activities but am I compassionate to stand before His presence?

**B. How did God's messengers preach and draw the crowd?
What kind of crowd was Christ targeting?**

In John 3:7-14, John the Baptist did not mince his words. He was blunt, forthright and politically insensitive. Imagine calling your audience "a brood of vipers". Surprisingly, he drew a crowd, including tax collectors and soldiers. Why would soldiers with swords respond to his message? They could have easily cut him down.

Then Jesus said to them, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. ... Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this, said, 'This is a hard saying; who can understand it? When Jesus knew in Himself that His disciples complained about this, He said to them, 'Does this offend you? ... **From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more.**

John 6:54-66

Why didn't Jesus use simpler language or explain Himself to retain his followers? If I were Him, I would run after those who left to convince them that there would be more forthcoming entertaining sermons and parables with more miracles to be impressed. "Just wait till you see me feed another 5000!"

Why did our Lord tell his followers to shake off the dust from their feet to anyone who rejected Him?

Christ and His messengers were already sieving the sheep from the goats from the start. They were not seeking to increase church membership. **They were seeking the lost who were poor in spirit, willing to submit and be disciplined.** Anyone who sought things highly praised by men would have eliminated

themselves when confronted by the raw message, for example, “Unless you hate your father, mother...you cannot be My disciples”.

What kind of crowd do we draw? The modern churches of Christ are fond of using the word “member” as used by Paul instead of “disciples” as used by Christ. Which type are we drawing and to what are we pointing them to?

Now when they saw **the boldness** of Peter and John, and perceived that they were **uneducated and untrained men**, they marveled. And they realized that **they had been with Jesus.** Acts 4:13

Do people see that we have been with Christ because of our boldness despite our lack of education and training?

“For his letters,” they say, “are weighty and powerful, but **his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible.**”

2 Corinthians 10:10

Even though **I am untrained in speech**, yet I am not in knowledge. But we have been thoroughly manifested among you in all things. 2 Corinthians 11:6

So that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power. 2 Corinthians 2: 5

I used to draw people to the church, not Christ. “Come, we have a very good children’s Bible school. Buffet will be provided. You will be impressed by this speaker who specializes in drama. Our next speaker is a professor of Bible from the US”.

Are they responding to Christ or a marketing package? What happens when the impressive speakers take the next flight back? How impressive are we in maintaining expectations Sunday after Sunday? Have we betrothed the respondents to a plastic surgically modified Christ?

Reflection #2: Are we anywhere near the NT church? Am I drawing folks to Christ crucified or man glorified? Where do I draw my power? Am I making disciples of Christ or members who

demand privileges?

C. Preaching in season and out of season in poverty and persecution

What would you do if the secret police arrested and threw your brethren into prison? Would you be traumatized and required professional counselling?

At that time a **great persecution arose against the church** which was at Jerusalem; and they were all **scattered throughout the regions** of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. ... As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and **dragging off men and women, committing them to prison. Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.** Acts 8:1-4

The scattered Christians were like seeds cast into the wind of sweeping persecution. Each of them was a disciple, steward, and priest wherever they were scattered in the diaspora.

Unlike the modern church that emphasizes the need for leadership, the ancient church was a **leaderless movement** which the Roman empire was unable to contain. **What do you think they shared when the Bible was not yet completely compiled?** Do we preach in season and out of season? Or only if there is an event like a gospel meeting? Is the gospel we preached so powerless unless preached by some renowned preachers in a gospel meeting?

Beware of the leaven of Pharisees!

Therefore **whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do.** For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but **they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.**

Matthews 23:3-4

Reflection #3: Are we anywhere near the NT church? Have we replaced Christ as our Master, with clergy of leaders? Do we “lift

one of our fingers” only when moved by programmes and events?
Where do we draw our power and boldness from?

At a personal level, at home and with friends, are you able to share the following two points beyond quoting book, chapter and verse?

And when He got into the boat, he who had been demon-possessed begged Him that he might be with Him. However, Jesus did not permit him, but said to him, ‘Go home to your friends, and tell them **1) what great things the Lord has done for you, and 2) how He has had compassion on you.**’

Mark 5:19

We are not growing as fast as the New Testament church. We are not bearing much fruit. We know the Bible but do we know Christ? We are members of the church of Christ but are we disciples of Christ? With a cosmetic faith we can do nothing.

I am the vine, you are the branches.

He who abides in Me, and I in him,

bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

John 15:5

EDITOR’S NOTE:

Brother James writes from the heart about how he sees the situation in Singapore. No doubt it will make us think seriously about our situation.

You must be born again

Jamie McIlroy, Stretford

Have you ever had to buy a new kitchen appliance - maybe a dishwasher, or a washing machine? Once you’ve ripped open all the packaging, you’ll often find a hefty operating manual inside. And then once you’ve flicked through it for a few seconds, you’ll

quickly realise that it's written in what seems like a hundred different languages! If you're like me, you'll throw it away impatiently after you can't find the English section! If you're really lucky, you might stumble across a "Quick Start Guide" - but again, if you're like me you'll probably throw that away too, and then just attempt to switch the thing on!

There is one book within the Bible that, for me, stands out from the rest. I like to, reverently, think of it as the "Quick Start Guide". The book of John gets straight to the point. It's a book that summarises the life of Jesus. Who He is, and most importantly, what He had to say when He was here.

The book of John starts in a similar manner to the book of Genesis.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God. John 1:1

Jesus is the Word of God.

And the book of John explains why it was written near its conclusion:

So that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.

John 20:31

John 3 records a meeting between Jesus and one of the Jewish rulers, a Pharisee called Nicodemus. Their conversation gets right to the heart of the gospel, and teaches us how to respond to Jesus. But first, let's take a look at the background to the meeting which took place at night.

Nicodemus had heard Jesus' preaching and was amazed at the miracles that He was able to perform. As a Pharisee, he was very familiar with the Scriptures and would have known about God's supernatural powers that He displayed through the prophets of old. He would have known about people such as Moses, Samson and Elijah. And he would have known that the Messiah was coming. Even though God had been silent for hundreds of years

since the book of Malachi, Nicodemus, as a teacher of Israel, would have known that Immanuel, which means “God with us”, could arrive at any time.

But there was a problem, Nicodemus didn’t want to be seen in public with Jesus, because that would have instantly ostracised him from his peers - so that is why he decided to meet Jesus under the cover of darkness.

The Pharisees were not humble men. They were very proud and had elevated themselves into powerful positions within the Jewish society. And now, they were being completely upstaged by Jesus, who was able to perform incredible miracles, and would eventually even raise people from the dead! Jesus didn’t come merely to heal the sick though. He came to fulfil the Scriptures as written by the prophet in Isaiah 61. You can read all about an amazing incident relating to this fact for yourself in Luke 4.

Jesus taught that, “Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

His teachings were contrary to the behaviour of the Jewish leaders. The people were astonished at His teaching, because His word was with authority. Nicodemus said to Jesus, “Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; because no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.”

A lot has been preached about why Nicodemus met up with Jesus in secret. About how he initially kept his suspicions about Jesus being the Messiah private. And then finally, about how later in John 7, when the chief priests and Pharisees wanted to capture Jesus, he objected to them publicly. However, for now, I want to focus on the conversation that took place between these two men.

Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and

where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

John 3:5-8

This famous passage has been preached countless times. The words may even be so familiar that you can recite them from memory. But, let's think back to when we heard them for the first time.

Imagine how the words would have sounded to Nicodemus as he heard them for the first time. I visited the church in Belfast, Northern Ireland recently, where the words, “Ye must be born again” are painted boldly in full view of the congregation, on the wall, above the folding doors that lead into the baptistry.

Growing up in the church, we become familiar with certain Bible verses. But sometimes I wonder, if we become over familiar with them. Perhaps we've seen or heard something so often that we've stopped noticing it. We've seen it so many times that we forget its significance. But imagine a visitor walking into the building and seeing those words written on the wall. What must they be thinking?

They might, just like Nicodemus, be left wondering, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?” Jesus said that unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

I'm sure that He would have likely explained this to Nicodemus in a lot more detail than John's brief account of the meeting, because when I heard Jesus' statement for the first time, I felt that I was still left with the question “How?” - How can I be born of water? - How can I be born of the Spirit?

I have no doubt that Nicodemus would have remained with Jesus that evening until he got all of the answers that he needed. Just as in Mark 4:34 it says that when they were alone, Jesus explained all things to His disciples.

In Acts 8, Philip was sent to teach the gospel to an Ethiopian eunuch, who was returning home from Jerusalem, where he had gone to the Temple to worship. The city was bustling with people

talking about Jesus' recent death & resurrection, and a lot of the Jews were coming to the realisation that He was the one referred to by the prophets.

And so, the Ethiopian man was sitting in his chariot on his way home, reading from the book of Isaiah the prophet when Philip approached him and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him. Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him.

We don't have Philip's exact words recorded in the book of Acts, but it makes perfect sense that he would have preached the gospel. He would have told the eunuch about the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, and he would have explained the necessary response needed to avail of the eternal life that Jesus offered all mankind. "You must be born again".

When Jesus preached the gospel to Nicodemus He spoke in figurative language about how He would be killed. After the crucifixion Nicodemus would have realised with astonishment, what Jesus had meant. Read John 3:13-15 alongside Numbers 21 for yourself and you'll see what I mean.

Just as Nicodemus was told that he must be born again as a response to the gospel, the Eunuch came to this same realisation.

Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, "See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?" Then Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. Acts 8:36

Also, compare Romans 10:10 and 1 Timothy 6:12

Everyone who wants their sins to be forgiven must be born of water. Even Saul, who persecuted the early church, had his sins forgiven after he responded to the gospel question that was put to

him by Ananias,

Why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord. Acts 22:16

The act of being born of water is found throughout the Bible. In fact, each time a rebirth/new beginning occurs, water is involved.

- The entire world was completely submerged in water before its rebirth in Genesis 7.
- The Israelites passed through the waters of the Red Sea in Exodus 14 to escape from the pursuing Egyptian army. This wasn't just a miraculously unusual escape plan. It was chosen by God to mark the rebirth of the Israel nation.
- And so it is with our baptism. Our old sinful bodies are plunged into water and lifted out as newborn babies in Christ. It marks the beginning of a new life, repentant and free from the burdens of our sinful past.

The apostle Peter told the Jews,

Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Acts 2:38

Baptism is a submissive verb. It's something that, as Peter explains, we must let happen to us. It has to be our choice. It is not something that can be forced on us without our understanding or agreement as to what is happening. Therefore, the Holy Spirit is only given to those who have willingly let themselves be baptised.

To be born of the Spirit is to submit our lives to the will of the Holy Spirit.

In John 3:5 when Jesus says to be born of the Spirit, He is not simply referring to the spirit of our minds, He's not talking about the part of us that controls our behaviour. He is referring to the third person of the Godhead.

I often wondered why I didn't immediately feel any different after I

was baptised. But this is exactly as expected. The reality is that you won't suddenly feel any different. You'll be wet of course, but you won't suddenly have a tingling feeling all over your body, or receive any supernatural powers. No, Jesus told Nicodemus "The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit." We can't see the wind, but we can see the evidence of its existence. Just because we can't see it doesn't mean that it isn't there.

Similarly, we can't see the Holy Spirit, but when we choose to truly submit to His will, we will see the evidence of His existence in our lives. Just because we can't see Him doesn't mean that He isn't there.

Galatians 5:22-23 lists the signs displayed by a Christian who is born of the Spirit - The apostle Paul said that the fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Jesus explained to Nicodemus that it was because,

God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

John 3:16-18

Jesus came here to save the world from sin. He came here with a message about rebirth, love and everlasting life! "You must be born again" is a clear command to turn our old sinful lives around and willingly hand them over to God.

Let's not push the Holy Spirit away, ignore or reject Him. Let's remember that after we've been baptised, He now lives within us. Paul says as much,

Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the

Spirit of God dwells in you?

1 Corinthians 3:16

If you are not born again, then I'd urge you to consider your standing with God. And if you have been born again, I'd urge you to remember that the Holy Spirit lives within you.

I began by showing that the aim of John's "Quick Start Guide" is for you to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have eternal life in His name.

So then, why are you waiting? Be born again!

CHURCH OF CHRIST DENNYLOANHEAD GHANA FUND

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Donald Scobbie, 23, Princes Street, Bonnybridge FK4 1BJ

e-mail: donald.scobbie@blueyonder.co.uk

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EDITOR: Allan Ashurst

60 Kenwood Road, Stretford, Manchester, M32 8PT

TREASURER: Kim Boland

2 Bryn Teg, Llanarth, Usk, Monmouthshire, South Wales, NP15 2AX

Send correspondence & articles to:

ScriptureStandard@gmail.com

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