

The SCRIPTURE STANDARD

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"Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us looking unto Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith"

Spontaneous acts of kindness

The other evening I noticed an item on the local TV news bulletin about a man touring his local town performing "random acts of kindness" hoping to encourage others to follow his example. He would pay someone's bus fare for them or buy someone a sandwich and other similar gestures.

I missed the start of the item and didn't catch what his motivation was, but it reminded me of a favourite phrase - "spontaneous acts of kindness" which I once heard presented as a desirable feature of every Christian's daily life.

Now, in today's suspicious, litigious world, there seems less and less scope for spontaneous acts of kindness involving strangers. Which driver hasn't seen a cold, wet, wind-blown person at a bus stop looking hopefully up the road, and thought about stopping to offer a lift only to decide, "No, I'd better not. They'll think I'm some kind of pervert?" I've seen toddlers lost and in distress and thought twice about whether, as a man, to help or I've been grateful that my wife was with me. And when we read of fake road accident victims to enable accomplices to steal the car of anyone stopping to help, we wonder how our world has got things so wrong.

Fortunately, in the Church, we have a body of people on whom we can, without any worry, perform spontaneous acts of kindness to our heart's content. Kindness is a "fruit of the Spirit" (Gal 5:22), "a mark of God's chosen people," (Col 3:12), "an effective and productive quality." (2 Peter 1: 5-8) A kind word, a gift, a phone call, a visit, a meal, a hand with a job, a letter, a bunch of flowers, a loan of equipment, a day out - the list could go on.

When it comes to acts of kindness, we can act before we think, because thinking might put us off. So if someone tries to be kind to you, accept and encourage them, even if it's not always quite what you wanted. Encouragement is a gift of grace (Rom.12:8) Jesus performed spontaneous acts of kindness and was condemned by the Pharisees because it was the Sabbath but He was not deterred. If spontaneous acts of kindness become an integral part of our Christian life, and are appreciated as such and encouraged, we **will** build each other up.

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A
PRIESTLY
PENITENTIAL
PAEAN
OF
PENITENTIAL
PAEAN
PRAISE 2

Ernest Makin (Wigan)

In Nehemiah chapter nine we are informed that on the twenty-fourth day of Ethanim or Tisri, October, i.e. two days after the newly celebrated Feast of Tabernacle, a reminder of the Israelitish tent dwelling in the desert, the Book of the Law of the Lord was read for a lengthy period. A national outpouring of penitential grief, and a lengthy confession of sins and imperfections followed this reading. Here is described a spontaneous explosion of conviction of man's shortcomings and the righteousness of God. The chapter, and Nehemiah in general, describe a national



conviction and confession followed by the people praising God joyously and committing to a renewal of the covenant with God. Such a movement gives credence to the axiom that 'confession, prayer and commitment are good for the soul'. The Levites led what became a joyous celebration and revival of faith. This culminated in a massive sealing of the Covenant led by Nehemiah the Governor of Jerusalem.

"And because of all this" (the events described in chapter nine) "we make a sure covenant and write it; and our princes, Levites and priests, seal unto it."

Nehemiah chapter ten lists the names of the people, led by Nehemiah the Governor of Jerusalem, who sealed the covenant to which the rest of the people bound themselves.

OUR GOD IS AN AWESOME GOD

Nehemiah 9 is a detailed poetic narrative of the miraculous signs and wonders performed by a faithful, just and righteous God for His chosen people. The psalm/poem/song begins with a glorification of the name of God. Verses five and six define with glorious certainty and clarity, and, based on the theology of the Law, the importance and awesomeness of the name of God. (see Exodus 3:13-15.) The Law reveals a monotheistic God; our God is not one among many. God is incomparable. He 'made heaven', the 'earth and everything in it'. He preserves the whole of creation and even the host of heaven worship Him. (At your leisure read and luxuriate spiritually in the listed Psalms 8, 29, 33,46,61, 66, 92, 103, 148 and 150. There are other biblical extracts that can add to your 'certainty' that GOD IS AND THAT he cares for his people.)

The Book of Psalms/Praises is perhaps the most magnificent collection of songs, prayers and poetry to which we have access. The Book expresses the deepest felt passions of human emotions. The psalms listed above illustrate ecstatic praise for the Creator, Provider and Sustainer of the universe. They extol the glory of the Lord in creation and history, praising His holiness and majesty. These bring into sharp focus the sovereignty of the Lord as a refuge for His people and a conqueror of nations. They provide assurance of eternal protection while praising God for His awesome works. Psalms such as these praise God for His love, faithfulness and mercies with the very creation rising to praise Him. The book of Nehemiah ends with a rousing dictat - **"let all things praise the Lord."** Such is the nature of our God who offers through Jesus, His Christ, His unsearchable spiritual riches to the present day disciple of His beloved Son.

For the next twenty-five verses, from seven to thirty-one inclusive, there is a recital of all that A JUST, FAITHFUL AND LOVING God did for His people. These, mostly miraculous events were accomplished in spite of the fact that Jewish history was punctuated with bouts of unacceptable faithlessness. Indeed the whole history of the descendants of Abraham is a patchwork of chequered events, some highly acceptable to the God of Abraham, Jacob and Isaac, but others unworthy of those who would claim the exclusivity of being children of God.

A PEOPLE OF GOD

Nehemiah chapter nine is a historical cornucopia of the events of the unfolding tapestry of the development of the people of God from a family drawn from a sophisticated town in Chaldea,

through nomadic desert wanderings into a settled kingdom and ultimate political and religious downfall. Below is a flimsy catalogue of such events. Only by personal, serious and committed study will one reap the full benefits of the handling of the word of God. Only you, reader, can perform that task. The narrative begins with:

- ❑ the election of Abram/Abraham- Read Genesis chapters 12, 15 and 17 and refer to Galatians chapter 3 through to chapter 4.v7;
- ❑ the giving of the Promised Land and taking such from the Canaanitish tribes/nations because of their overriding sinfulness. Read Genesis 15:17-21; Exodus 3:7-10; Exodus 23:20-33; Exodus 33: 1-3 and Deuteronomy 7:1-8. "YOU (i.e. God) HAVE PERFORMED YOUR WORDS FOR YOU ARE RIGHTEOUS."
- ❑ the redemption from Egypt, surely a foreshadowing of the redemption from sin. For an appreciation of these events I would recommend that any child of God read the whole of the book of Exodus. Read it and luxuriate in the manner of God's concern and protection for His people.
- ❑ the presentation of the Decalogue via the hand of the prototypical prophet, Moses. Read Exodus 19 and 20.
- ❑ the proud disobedience of the Israelites and the unfaithful events of their wanderings. Read Numbers 14 and Exodus 32. "BUT YOU ARE GOD READY TO PARDON, GRACIOUS AND MERCIFUL AND SLOW TO ANGER."
- ❑ God established the Kingdom for His people and provided their administrative districts.
- ❑ the people of God were provided with land, wealth and material prosperity. "SO THEY ATE AND WERE FILLED AND GREW FAT AND DELIGHTED THEMSELVES IN YOUR GREAT GOODNESS."
- ❑ the people rebelled during the rule of the judges and Israel's kings. They killed the prophets, an accusation levelled against them by Jesus; and because of repeated evils they were taken into political captivity, spirituality was lost and the Law ossified; the proud empire of Solomon became a political and spiritual non-entity. Read 2 Chronicles 32:vv1-33; 2 Chronicles 35:vv20-27; and 2 Chronicles 36:vv17-23.

A RIGHTEOUS GOD

Verses 32 to 35 of Nehemiah joyfully return to a jubilant acknowledgement of the righteousness of God. Read Deuteronomy 32: 3-4 and Exodus 15: 11-13. "NOW," (at the time of the revival under Ezra) "THEREFORE OUR GOD, THE GREAT, THE MIGHTY AND AWESOME GOD WHO KEEPS COVENANT" (i.e. is totally reliable). Verse 33 defines the fundamental reality and theological concept of the relationship of God and His people during all historical periods. "YOU ARE JUST" (i.e. an affirmation of the righteousness of God) "WE HAVE DONE WICKEDLY." This is not only the reality of the time but of all history of God and His chosen people and the basis of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus, the Christ.

Finally in an ironic statement the people who had indeed been commanded to be servants of the Lord were truly servants in their own land. The irony was that they were servants of kings to whom they still paid taxes and who ruled from Medo-Persia. The statement ends with a demand for action and not just sentiment.

"We make a sure covenant and write it; our leaders, our Levites and priests will seal it." Is this not a return to the Abrahamic faithfulness- total commitment to a righteous, merciful and loving God?

If you believe that "all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for instruction in righteousness; so that the man of God may be complete and thoroughly furnished to all good works", then Nehemiah should have a great deal which is profitable to present day children of God. Sometime in the near future I hope to return to the words of Nehemiah nine and tease out some relevant meaning and lessons in reality for the present day.

Word Study Fellowship

Ian Davidson (Motherwell)

There is a great fellowship in Christ Jesus. The Master once said in response to a statement by Peter: **"Verily I say unto you, There is no man who has left house, or brothers, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, but he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brothers, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life."** (Mark 10:29,30). We clearly see from this passage that Christianity is not just a "pie-in-the-sky" religion. There are many blessings to be enjoyed now and many of these blessings result from our relationships with our fellow saints. I think it is true to say that quite a number of Christians reading this article will confess that they feel closer to their brothers and sisters in the Lord than to brothers and sisters in the flesh, who are not in the Lord. I could tell you about the houses that are open to me because I am a Christian, and about the people whom I have grown to know and love in the Lord, who are truly fathers and mothers and brothers and sisters to me. Not all of them live in Britain.

" FELLOWSHIP " ANALYSED

The Greek word for "fellowship" is *koinonia*. The root word is *koinos*, which means common. Those in Christ share something in common. The fellowship of the Spirit is actually the sharing of eternal life, which is the life of God Himself. And let it be emphasised, that we are not in Christ Jesus because we are in the fellowship, but we are in the fellowship because we are in Christ Jesus. If this is the case, then is fellowship something we can extend or withdraw? Surely it is, as one writer put it, "a state or condition created by the Holy Spirit in which we share through the amazing grace of God." Fellowship, therefore, should not be equated with endorsement. I personally enjoy the fellowship of hundreds of brothers and sisters in the Lord, but that does not mean I endorse everything they say and do. I have definite views about a lot of things, especially about the Lord's Supper and the ministry of the Church. But I do not make a lot of the divisive issues "tests of fellowship". Some brethren have asked me: "Do you fellowship individual cups or instrumental music?" To me, such a question manifests their ignorance of what fellowship in Christ is really all about. Can I hold to my views and my brethren at the same time? I think I can - and I do!

For example, I know brothers and sisters who smoke cigarettes; drink wine; abstain from meat; work some Sundays; think that Christ is coming before the millennium; think that the millennium is coming before Christ; have difficulty in spelling millennium; equate breaking the loaf with eating the loaf; sanction deeds of covenant; endorse Bible colleges and schools; oppose eating in the meeting house; reject the use of leavened bread at the Lord's table; renounce Church business meetings; refuse to allow sisters to speak in a Bible study class; think little of Alexander Campbell; etc. I could go on and on. I agree with the controversial Carl Ketcherside when he wrote: "The only way God can be in the fellowship with us is by being merciful, tolerant and longsuffering. Thus, the fellowship revealed in the scriptures is one which demands such characteristics."

THE KOINONIA AT SEA

I see a ship on the ocean when I think of fellowship. It is called the *Koinonia*. The captain is Christ Himself. All His followers are in this ship together. They are bound for a port or haven called "Heaven". Above all, they want to bring others on board so they too can feel safe, sure and secure. They all know that there will be stormy times ahead, but remain eternally confident that He and His crew will see them through the dark and tempestuous seas to the glory world. There are dangerous rocks everywhere, but Jesus knows the safe channel and that is good enough for His passengers. No one questions His ability or authority. After all, there is no one better or greater than He. They have left the port of "Sin" behind and there is no turning back. To jump ship would be absolutely unthinkable. It could only mean disaster and death.

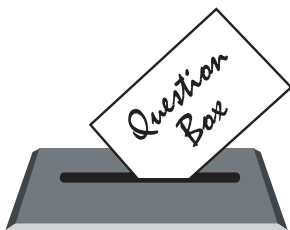
The passengers help one another on the voyage. They work together; sing together; pray together and eat together. There are words of encouragement each day for all. There are no first, second or third class passengers on this ship. All are equal. Every Sunday, all get to sit at the Captain's table and partake of a very special meal. His presence is guaranteed and this provides particular comfort and cheer. Many of His crew are working behind the scenes and are never seen. They are called angels. They are doing an outstanding job and are striving to keep the ship on course and the passengers happy.

Other boats are seen on the voyage to Heaven. Tragically, they are all sailing in the opposite direction. The word is that their destination is "Hell". Every one of them appears to be full to the funnel. Their cries of worldly fun and amusement are heard as they pass by. They seem oblivious to the dangers ahead, although our Captain says that they are without excuse because they have been well warned. The warnings have come not only from the Captain Himself, but also from His brave and courageous messengers. Those in *Koinonia* wonder why others prefer darkness to light, falsehood to truth, death to life, Satan to God. They wonder why these others do not see the power, wisdom and goodness of God in the heavens above and in the oceans below; the justice, truth and holiness of God in His wonderful providence; and the mercy, favour and love in the glorious gospel of Christ. The expression "all at sea" seems to be an apt one for the countless numbers not part of the fellowship or *Koinonia*.

FINAL COMMENTS

I conclude with some comments on fellowship.

- "Fellowship is sharing in a life, in the Divine nature. It is joint participation in the Holy Spirit, the gift of God to all His children".
- "God has no step-children and we can have no half-brothers in the Lord". "Those who are in the fellowship will never see everything alike while in the flesh and caught up in the human predicament, there will always be areas of disagreement and matters in which not all can jointly participate".
- "Only the mind of God could have conceived of a community composed of ransomed slaves in which the dignity of each individual is preserved while each esteems others better than himself. Such a society whose members are together not because they are bound to like one another, but are bound together because they all mutually love another person, never entered the most fanciful dreams of the philosophers of Ancient Greece or Rome".
- "We share with each other in Christ because He has shared His bounty and grace with us. We are not in the fellowship because of our attainments in wealth, power, prestige, wisdom or knowledge...We are partners, not through anything we did, or because of any accomplishments of our own, but because of the riches of His grace".



The following question, concerning the way we celebrate the Lord's Supper, has been asked by an obviously thoughtful young man. It is a query which, I think, will find an echo in the minds of many of us and may help to focus our thinking on what we do when we sit at the Lord's Table.

'Matt.26 v.26 records that, "**Jesus took bread and blessed it.**" We also often ask God to bless the bread. What do we mean by this, and what form do we expect the blessing to take?'

First, I think it would be useful to look at the precise wording used by the New Testament writers when they record what was done in the Upper Room that night, when the Lord Jesus celebrated the Passover with His disciples, and then proceeded to institute His own memorial Supper, because it will help us to see exactly what - or whom - it was that the Lord 'blessed'.

The Gospel Accounts

Beginning with Matthew and the statement in the verse to which the question refers, we find that the word '*it*' is in italics. Now, I feel sure that you know that, when, in the New Testament, words are *italicised*, we are meant to understand that they do not occur in the Greek text but have been supplied by the translators in order to provide what they regard as a clearer translation into English. Sometimes they succeed, but at other times they miss the true meaning of the text and convey a wrong impression. Unfortunately, this is what has happened in the 'Authorized Version', of Matt.26: 26.

The accurate rendering of the verse is found in Mark's account, ch.14 v.22, which says that "**Jesus took bread, and blessed.**" Luke's version reports, "**And He took bread and gave thanks.**" (Luke 2: 19). From John's account we learn nothing about what occurred at either of the meals. He only records what happened '*before the feast of the Passover*' (ch.13 v.1), and tells us, in the next verse, '*and the supper being ended....*'

Paul's Account

The one remaining account is that of Paul in 1st Cor. 11, and it is of very special interest to us because;

- 1) Paul states that he had received it from the Lord Jesus in person.
- 2) Since 1st Corinthians was written about 56 A.D., it pre-dates the four Gospels and makes this the earliest account we have of the institution of the Lord's Supper.

The apostle tells us - on the authority of the Lord Jesus Himself - that He '*took bread: and when he had given thanks...*' (v.23-24). So the question is, did Jesus bless the bread? And, again, should we, in celebrating the Lord's Supper, ask God to bless either the bread or the cup?

The Celebration Of The Passover.

A little research into the traditional manner in which the Passover meal was celebrated, as described in rabbinical literature, proves both interesting and enlightening, and reveals that, by the time of Jesus, the ritual had undergone quite extensive change.

The Simplicity of the First Passover Meal

The description in Exodus 12, of that historic night when God '*passed over*' Egypt, reveals that the 'first Passover meal' was a very simple affair, because it was hastily prepared and eaten in readiness for a journey. Even today there are elements in the ritual which, although quite basic, are accepted as compulsory and essential to a proper celebration of the feast.

According to Rabban Gamaliel, the words '*Passover*', '*unleavened bread*' and '*bitter herbs* must be spoken during the feast, and, '*whoever has not said the verses concerning these three things at Passover, has not fulfilled his obligation*'. There is no proper celebration of Passover.

However, as might be expected, with the passage of time the, '*Haggadah*', (the Passover ritual), became more formal and elaborate, as other symbolic features were added. For instance, in Exodus ch. 12, there is no mention of the use of wine, or any significance attached to it, on the night of God's Passover. It is considered that the wine was added to the commemoration, either during, or after, the return from the Babylonian captivity. According to Rabbi Dr. Isadore Epstein, the wine, along with extra items of food, such as shank-bones and eggs, were added to symbolize and express the joy of Redemption from slavery, and

the meal itself was further enriched by the addition of a sauce made of raisins and dates, which is said to represent the clay with which the Israelites were compelled to make bricks for the Egyptians.

The Feast

Let me briefly describe the manner in which the Passover meal eventually came to be celebrated. The family members – perhaps including guests - recline on couches around the Passover Table, and, after the Master of the Feast -(this would be the father, as head of the family)- has given thanks, the celebration begins with the sharing of a cup of wine mixed with water. Arthur Hertzberg states that this is the first of four cups of wine that are drunk in the course of the Feast.

This is followed by the ritual washing of hands, after which the Passover meal is brought to the Table. The meal itself consists of roast lamb, unleavened bread (the '*matzoth*'), and bitter herbs, as commanded in Exodus 12: 8. These 'herbs', watercress, chicory, lettuce, endive, dandelion and sorrel, are eaten as a salad, which, because of its bitterness, serves as a reminder of the bitter years of slavery endured by the Hebrews in Egypt.

The Master of the Feast then gives thanks for the bitter herbs and the fruit, expressing gratitude to the Creator who causes them to grow in the earth:

"Praised are You, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, Creator of the fruit of the vine".

The Teaching of the Children

At this point, the dishes containing the food are taken away from the table, and the children are taught the meaning of Passover, in obedience to the command found in Exodus 12:26-27. The food is then brought back to the Table, and the guests drink the second cup of wine and sing Psalms 110 and 115. This is followed by a second washing of hands, during which another traditional prayer is spoken.

***"Praised are You, O Lord our God, King of the Universe,
Who brings forth bread out of the earth".***

The Master of the Feast then breaks a cake of unleavened bread, and gives a half to be divided among the guests. The remaining half is eaten, with the guests dipping pieces of it into the sauce (the '*charoseth*'), and eaten with the bitter herbs. Refer to John 13:26. (The previous day was the day when the Peace Offering would have been offered, and, according to custom, a part of that offering would have been returned to the worshipper, to be shared with family or friends. This was usually eaten at this point in the Passover celebration, although it was not a compulsory item in the ritual).

Afterwards, the Passover lamb is eaten, and there follows a third hand-washing ceremony and another expression of thanks. Then the guests drink the third cup of wine, which is called '*the cup of blessing*', so called, because they all thanked God for His goodness. (Compare 1st Cor. 10:16).

Finally, fourth cup of wine is shared, and, because it is accompanied by the singing of Psalms 115 to 118, this is known as '*the cup of Hallel*', (or '*Praise*'), and the ceremony ends with a final prayer.

What - or whom – did the Lord bless?

He did not ask God to bestow some sort of sanctifying 'blessing' on either the unleavened bread, or the fruit of the vine. When He prayed before giving the bread and grape juice to His disciples, there seems little doubt that He was following the Passover practice of expressing praise and thanks to the Father, and He was teaching the disciples to express praise and gratitude to Him, for the redemption that He was about to secure for them, by the offering of Himself as their Passover Lamb.

The 'blessing' about which we should think, is of the nature of that of the Psalmist in Psalm 103. It is a Psalm of pure praise, the very reading of which is a blessing.

"Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; Who healeth all thy diseases; Who redeemeth thy life from destruction..."

For us, then the Lord's Supper presents an opportunity for the offering of personal thanks, worship and praise to God, for the giving us a Saviour. It is a time for the expression of our gratitude for everything that the bread and the fruit of the vine represent.

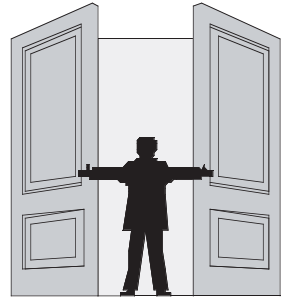
Practical Christianity

Surviving University

When the editor first suggested I write an article on 'surviving university' I could not help but see the irony. Before I moved to Manchester in the summer of 2000, a much-respected friend told me not to let my degree get in the way of an education. I think it's just a coincidence that he has since gone bald - but maybe it's representative of my ensuing three years in pursuit of that 'education'. Due to the lack of pursuit demonstrated in the first of my three years (what I now affectionately refer to as my practice year!) I've still got one more year to go. So, although I'm not out of jail just yet, I'm well on my way and hopefully a couple of the things that I have picked up along the way might be of help to others who are about to head off to pastures new.

THE BEST YEARS OF OUR LIVES...

The three or four years a person will spend at university could quite possibly be amongst the best years of their lives. It is a time packed with the opportunities and challenges that come hand in hand with next to no responsibility coupled with all the freedom in the world. I guess it is true that you go away a teenager and come back an adult, not only in age but also in attitude and mentality (though others might disagree). In that respect as my friend was trying to get across to me, it is not just about getting a degree; it is about experiencing life, growing, maturing and to some extent finding your self. One huge aspect of that experience for a young Christian is how those challenges and opportunities mould and make the faith that they carry with them up the steps of the halls of residence for the very first time. And that leads to...



...GROWING PAINS

When I was younger and very much involved in going to camps and weekends and the sort, I would always remember older teenagers and young adults talking about the experience of

"I can honestly say that I feel I know less than ever before, but the little I do know, I am sure of."

finding their own faith. I never quite understood it because I had been a Christian since a young age and had always considered myself to have my own faith; it was I who had accepted Jesus as my Lord and Saviour and it was I who had gone about pursuing a greater depth of love and understanding. For me to hear other people, who I know had grown up in a similar situation, talking about finding their faith just seemed a little strange. Standing where I am now however, it seems very clear. As young people growing up in a family and a local congregation we absorb so much from the environment that surrounds us and we inherit a lot from the belief systems and the worldviews of that environment. It is not a bad thing; it is just a natural part of growing up. The reality is that the faith you carry up those steps for the first time is embedded in a lot of presuppositions that might never have been challenged before.

At university, the chances are you will meet so many people, from so many different backgrounds, who believe so many different things, that you will not be able to help but challenge some of those presuppositions. It does not mean you are weak and it does not mean you are doing anything wrong; it just probably means you are growing up and finding your own path. I know that in my case, not only have I come across such challenges through the people that I have come across but also in the course that I am taking. I am doing a degree in the study of religion and theology and although it is probably different to what some might expect, it is obviously very challenging when you are always having to question what you believe. For me, as a result, some presuppositions have stood and some have fallen, whilst some beliefs have remained and some have changed.

I have to admit that at times it has felt like I'm in a bit of a no man's land, caught between trenches and not quite sure of what to believe. In all honesty such times can be a little disorientating... as a person who likes to know precisely in what direction he is heading, I have to admit to finding such times a little frustrating. The base line is that if you keep searching... you will keep finding! The faith that has been furnished and refined by those experiences will be all the more integral to you, therefore you are able to be more true to yourself. I can honestly say that I feel I now know less than ever before, but the little I do know, I am sure of! , For me the opportunity of such a challenge has been that however weak or strong, it is my faith, it is what I know, it is what I believe and it is what I will uphold as I stand before my Maker

REMEMBER YOUR FIRST LOVE

When university life gets a little too much for your faith for whatever reason, the best piece of advice I was given was to get back to basics. A friend, not long out of university, told me that and it has stuck with me since. It is all about getting back to the big picture and forgetting about the confusing details for a while. It is about remembering why you became a Christian in the first place and dwelling on those things. It is about getting tuned in to the beauty and simplicity of the greatest commandment, that we should love the Lord with our whole being and love those around us, as we want to be loved. It is about spending a little time being open and honest with your Maker and taking the opportunity to refocus at the beginning of a week with the people you love around the Lord's Table. Sometimes it is not easy and at other times it might seem more convenient to be doing something else, but as with anything else of value in your life, you have to work at it and give it the priority, if it is to bear fruit.

Finally, university is there to be enjoyed and experienced to its max. One thing on my mind at the present time going in to my final year is that although I have thoroughly enjoyed the last three years I probably have not juiced them for all I can. So my advice would be to get involved with as much as possible, and enjoy it as much as possible, do not hold back. Take your faith with you and be confident that it will thrive on the opportunities and benefit from the challenges that life away from home will present to you. When in Manchester I wake up every morning to a poem, which is on the wall next to my bed. It reminds me that life is there for the living, and that attitude embedded in a commitment to the greatest commandment will hopefully see you through your 'education'.

***'O me! O life!... of the questions of these recurring; of the endless trains of the faithless—of cities filled with the foolish; what good amid these, O me, O life? Answer. That you are here - that life exists, and identity; that the powerful play goes on and you may contribute a verse.'* –
(Whitman)**



Foundations of the Faith

*A series of studies into the foundational truths
of the Christian Faith*

THE NATURE OF MAN (Graham Gorton, Stretford)

In the beginning

In Genesis we read, "So God created man, in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them..."

Many have speculated on the phrase, "in his own image." Whatever this means it surely conveys a noble picture of mankind, the highest form of God's creation. God gave man a blessing and a charge... **"Be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature."**

The writer of the Hebrew letter in the New Testament, quoting from Psalm 8, says, **"What is man that you are mindful of him...you made him a little lower than the angels, you crowned him with glory and honour and put everything under his feet..."**

Thus the Biblical portrayal of man indicates a high status for him and a great measure of responsibility as a steward of the resources God provides in the created order. Someone with such a position and responsibility exercises reason and choice. He also has a thinking process operating in all that he does and perhaps in these facets of man's nature we get a glimpse of man being in the image of God.

Obviously mankind is very complex and there are other attributes that determine his lifestyle such as emotion, nurture, environment, generic make-up to name just a few.

A Sad Picture

The Bible however also depicts a darker side to man's nature. It is this portrayal that so often meets with opposition from secular bodies who can only view man as a human animal evolving ever upward to greater heights of achievement and power.

It is a tragedy that in recent history the nations perceived to be the most developed artistically, scientifically, and technologically and having a civilized culture, have been engaged in the events of what may well be the most bloodthirsty century of human history. In two World Wars and in countless other cruel conflicts, the most awful suffering and mass killings have been perpetrated and indeed are still ongoing around the globe.

Positive though man's progress has been in the fields of science and technology there is no evidence of his moral improvement. We simply have the effects of wickedness amplified by the force of technical progress – man once fought with swords and spears; now he has missiles and almost unlimited destructive capacity. The engine that drives man stems from his heart – a heart that all too often is inclined to wickedness by virtue of its rebellion against the Creator.

The Bible is also clear and uncompromising in pin-pointing the problem that has demeaned man's noble origins. Therefore:

"Every inclination of thoughts of his (mans) heart was only evil all the time..."
(Gen. 6:5) – thus indicating man's condition before the flood;

"...even though every inclination of his heart is only evil from childhood..."
(Gen. 8:21) – an indication of man's disposition that would be evident in the years after the flood; and

"...the heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure..." (Jer. 17:9)

Human history portrayed in the Old Testament leaves us with no ambiguity about the

consequences of disobeying God. God set the options, and the consequences of their choice, before his chosen people. God implored them to **".....choose life so that you and your children may live."** (Deut. 30: 15-20) Some who were circumcised in their hearts (to use Old Testament language) made the right choice and Hebrews chapter 11 presents us with some of the saints of old who were "commended for their faith." Sadly, the carnal nature of many more has blighted man's destiny, and still does today.

So we have a Biblical picture of man as a noble being corrupted by his disobedience to God as he pursues his own selfish desires.

The Way Back

Looking into the New Testament scriptures the true nature of man is presented clearly and consistently alongside the Old Testament record. Jesus presents us with teaching (much of which is often overlooked by current religious thinking that seeks to make Christian doctrine more acceptable to modern man) about man's carnal nature. At the end of the second chapter of John's gospel it is recorded that "many believed in his name" as they witnessed the miraculous work of Jesus and yet we are told that **"...Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men. He did not need man's testimony about man, for he knew what was in man."** (John 2: 23-25)

In the following chapter in a discourse with Nicodemus, Jesus told this learned Pharisee... **"I tell you the truth, no-one can see the Kingdom of God unless he is born again..."** We are now seeing God's purpose unfolding. Man's nature, sinful and carnal, needs refinement. This is brought about by a new beginning – a new birth – spiritual regeneration.

John the Baptist, forerunner of Jesus, made preparation for the coming of the Messiah by calling mankind to repentance. He did this in the starkest language. Man needed a sharp rebuke concerning his lifestyle and attitudes. John delivered it and did so, as his mission required, to point men to Jesus who would save them from their sins.

In Paul's letter to Timothy he wrote, **"Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance; Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners..."** (1 Tim. 1:15) By ourselves we cannot achieve a change to our nature that will bring about our salvation. The good news of God's intervention in human affairs began the process of leading mankind to a new life. This entails the new birth brought about as our wicked hearts are cleansed by faith and we are led into obedience consequent upon our repentance (which demands a new and reformed outlook). Our baptism into Christ completes the new birth. Now we are as little children and the refining process continues. Paul prayed that the Ephesian Christians might have the eyes of their hearts enlightened. This is an ongoing process as we mature in Christ and the old nature is brought under control as we develop our spiritual lives.

No complacency

As we do grow in Christ however we are soon aware that the old man will try to reassert his influence. Paul speaks of this struggle, recorded in Romans 7, in this way... **"When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law, but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members."** Paul rejoices that through Jesus Christ we will be rescued from this dilemma. He concludes his statement like this, **"So then I myself am a slave in my mind to God's law but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin."**

The Divine Nature

Christian people know full well that to understand the Good News of the gospel we must first accept the unpalatable truth about our fleshly nature. When we come into Christ we begin to experience the status that God intended for man in the beginning. We, by God's power, **"may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption that is in the world caused by evil desires."** (2 Peter 1:4) And, step by step, the nature of man will be overcome by the spirit of God.

The Growing Church 2

Congregational Growth

(Alastair Ferrie, Dundee)

Last time we began to look at the idea of the growing Church and we began quite correctly with individual growth. For the Church to grow as a body, it is absolutely necessary that the individual members are growing. In fact I think we can go as far as to say..

- **When individual members of the Church are growing spiritually, the Church as a whole cannot fail to grow both spiritually and numerically.**
- **When the growth of the individual members has stagnated then it does not matter how fancy the programmes developed nor how industrious the preacher or others are, we do not have the right climate for growth!**

And so for part 2 of this series, we turn back to the original text we were looking at last time for another look. This time we look at the passage in terms of the growth of the Church as a body. What does this passage have to say about the growing Church?

¹¹ And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ; ¹⁴ so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles. ¹⁵ Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love. (Eph 4:11-16)

In our text we see the Church as the growing Church! When I came and had meetings with the Church about coming to Dundee to work with them, the one thing that I remember coming through from our discussions is that they were anxious that the Dundee Church should be a growing Church. And I have always felt this was at the forefront of my ministry wherever I was. We all agreed that what we wanted for Dundee was a growing Church. And there can be little doubt that we now have a growing Church. How we improve on the growing nature of the Dundee Church is the subject of my meditation and out of that has grown this article. The answers are to be found in the text.

A. Equipping the Saints for Ministry:

At the outset of our reading for today is the statement that God had arranged that there be leadership in the Church for a very specific purpose. And that purpose is spelt out in very clear terms.... ¹² **to equip the saints for the work of ministry,**

And this is a fundamental point, which is at the very heart of a growing Church.

- **In a great many churches, 99% of the work is done by 1% of the people.**
- **Churches where the Church as a whole relies upon the preacher or literally one or two individuals, are stagnating churches that are in the early stages of dying.**
- **Churches where there is a high level of ministry, or involvement amongst most of the members are churches that are guaranteed to grow!**

There can be little doubt that as we look at the role of the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists and the pastoring-teachers (this is a compound noun in the Greek and signifies one class of people), their role was

not to do the work of the Church. It was not to fulfil every ministry that the Church is involved in, but it was to train the Church to do the work of the Church.

Indeed it stands to reason that if we have a congregation of 100 sitting in Dundee or some other place, one or two cannot fulfil the ministry of 100 people. But the way forward for the Church is that the 100 (or as close as we can get to that 100) must fulfil the work of the 100.

Notice in our text that the role of the evangelist today, and the role of the pastoring teachers (the elders) is to equip the saints for ministry. i.e. to equip the Church to do the work of the Church.

And what we are discussing here is a very Biblical principle. I will give two scriptural examples of this in action. In Acts 6:1-6, a difficulty had arisen in the Jerusalem Church over the distribution of assistance to widows. A certain ministry was not being taken care of the way that it should. There were apostles in the Church and it was their overall responsibility. But we note that this task need not be undertaken by the apostles. Should they stop their ministry of the word in order to make sure that the distribution of food was taken care of? The answer was no. It was not that the distribution of food was unimportant or that they regarded it to be unimportant. This is clear from the calibre of the men subsequently appointed. But the apostles could not be expected to take care of every single ministry in the Church by themselves.

So it was determined by the Spirit of God that the apostles should arrange for certain other men to be appointed to take care of this ministry and they looked through the Church with the help of every member and selected out 7 who would be responsible and spiritual enough to carry out this task. And so these seven received a special ministry from the Lord to serve the Church.

The growing Church will be one in which every member of the Body has a ministry to fulfil and is equipped or trained to fulfil that ministry. The extent to which the Church accomplishes that sharing and equips each member for their ministry is the extent to which we can become the growing Church we need to be.

Further we note another passage that relates to this first congregation of the early Church. In Acts 8:1-4, there was a general persecution which arose against the Church after the death of Stephen. Notice that the artificial situation which had pertained in Jerusalem where many displaced persons who had come for the feast of Pentecost had remained following their conversion to Christ to be trained by the apostles, are now dispersed. You see the work of the apostles was to equip the saints for ministry.

When it comes to the preaching of the gospel, we might be tempted to say this is the work of the Apostles. And that is right, but the truth of the matter is that it is not the work of the Apostles alone.

- **We see that those that were scattered were the Christians in general except the apostles.**
- **And we see that it was those that were scattered who preached the Word from town to town and brought people to Christ.**

This is without doubt one of the biggest hindrances to the growth of the Church in this age... that the Church has lost the concept that the preaching of the gospel is each person's job and many are happy to "leave it to the professionals."

This was not so in the early Church. And if there is a congregation of 100 involved in preaching the gospel in a particular town or city then it will create a much larger impact than if just one or two are involved in the preaching of the gospel.

The churches that are growing are the ones where there is a general involvement amongst all or most of the members in inviting others to come along, studying with them and encouraging them to become Christians.

Well what will the evangelist be doing whilst everyone else is doing his work? Well that is a misconception because it is not the work of the evangelist to do the work of the Church. It is the work of the evangelist to do the work of the evangelist. The evangelist must take the lead for he is certainly to be a proclaimer of the good news for that is what the term evangelist means. And according to Eph 4, the work of the evangelist is to be equipping the saints for ministry, training the Church to do the work of the Church. And this must include reaching out to the lost with the gospel.

B. Building up the Body of Christ:

The second point we see in Eph 4 about the growing Church is that there must be a commitment to the **self-sustaining Church**.

When these kinds of statements are made, we are often tempted to be thinking of money. And there is a sense in which the local assembly should be growing to the point where it can sustain its own work from within the local congregation. But that kind of sustainability is not what I had in mind and it is not the kind of sustainability that Paul had in mind in this passage.

¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,

¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love.

We see a picture here of the Church as one in which members have a ministry: building up the body of Christ. Here we see a Church where **each member is sustained by each other member**. There is mutual help and support interconnecting the whole body.

Sometimes a Church can grow quite rapidly and then experience a contraction. One possible explanation for this is that the Church was depending on one person or at best a very small group of one or two people to sustain them and sustain their needs and their necessities for growth. But once the Church reaches a certain size it is impossible that this person or small group are able to sustain them any longer and the whole structure starts to fall apart.

But if the Church as a whole were involved in this self-sustaining business and the support mechanism was embraced by every member as the Lord intended then this need not be a barrier to further growth and the Church can go on growing and growing as it did in New Testament times.

There is a role for everyone here to help keep everyone else supplied with the strength and encouragement that they need to live the Christian life, to walk the Christian way, and to serve the Christian service. Take time to read Gal 6:1-2. What does this passage say?

- **It says that there will be those who are weak.**
- **It says that the spiritual need to be involved in sustaining and reclaiming the weak.**
- **It says that Christians need to be in the business of bearing the burdens of the weak in the Church till they become strong enough to bear their own.**
- **It says that this is what it means to fulfil the law of Christ.**
- **It says that every Christian needs to be prepared to take his own share of this responsibility.**

He is talking about the law of love. The extent to which the Church has truly become the community of love, is the extent to which it will be the growing Church.

In recent times, I have had a number of Christians comment to me how much help and support they get from the Church... and that we really do have a community of love. This is great. It means we have begun on the right road. But if the Church and its growth are to be sustained, then it is an area we need to continue to grow in if we are to truly be the growing Church we want to be here in Britain.

Conclusion:

My prayer for you is this:

- **That you locate a ministry that you can be involved in**
- **That you get involved in it with all of your might and all of the resourcefulness at your disposal**
- **That you get involved in sharing the gospel with others this year for your own sake as well as for the sake of everyone who knows you as well as for the sake of the Church as a whole.**
- **That you will grow in your commitment to the self-sustaining Church and learn to bear the burdens of your spiritual family and so help the Church to grow.**

News and Information

Ghana Appeal

The greatest care is prayerfully taken to use funds economically and effectively. It is encouraging to see the benefits accomplished both spiritually and physically. The baby girl born with severe internal abnormalities has successfully survived preliminary investigation and operations prior to major surgery. We appeal for your continued support for this child who has endured so much so well.

Many Ghanaians rely on their farm produce for survival. One brother who carried out some work on his farm too soon after a hernia operation is now back in hospital for an urgent remedial operation.

The Gospel continues to be spread and your donations have helped to supply a bicycle for a travelling preacher. This will enable him to do that more effectively.

New congregations continue to appear and a convert in an infant church who opened his home for worship has now been prohibited from doing so. We therefore appeal for funds to erect a temporary shelter for this purpose. Another church has been given funds to roof their new meeting place.

In an earlier report we mentioned the government scheme to provide boreholes for water supply at 10% of the actual cost. We have now sent funds for this and it is due to be implemented soon.

In one district there is great difficulty in finding sufficient water for baptisms and

a brother there is presently being treated for typhoid.

Finally it is encouraging to hear how impressed people outside the Church are when they see the loving care you are showing for brethren in Christ you have never seen.

Those wishing to contribute, please make cheques payable to:
Dennyloanhead Church of Christ Ghana Fund and send to the treasurer:

Mrs. Janet Macdonald, 12 Charles Drive, Larbert, Falkirk, Stirlingshire. FK5 3HB. Tel: 01324 562480

Editorial Comment

I'm delighted to say that in this month's edition there is no room for an 'Editorial', but I think you'll agree that there are some tremendous contributions. The article by Mark Webster on Surviving University will be of particular interest to young people some of whom will be about to launch out on their university careers. Please encourage younger readers by pointing out the article to them as we want to draw new readership into the magazine.

Nevertheless I do want to encourage you to contribute articles or persuade others to do so. Read Alastair Ferrie's article and let's make the SS a self-sustaining magazine. Also please keep the questions coming to Frank for QB. I can't believe that serious Bible students don't have questions raised as they study; so why not obtain Frank's input to your further studies? Please send your questions directly to Frank whose address is at the bottom of each of his articles.

Robert.

Coming Events

Stretford, Manchester Gospel Meetings

**Saturday, 20th September 2003
at 7.00pm**

Speaker:

Ernest Makin, Wigan

**Saturday, 25th October 2003
at 7.00 pm**

Speaker:

John Morgan, Hindley

**Saturday, 22nd November 2003
at 7.00 pm**

Speaker:

Vince O'Donovan, Brandon

There will be refreshments and discussion at 8.00 pm on each of the above occasions.

Ernest Makin and Vince O'Donovan will also speak on following Lord's Days, 21st September and 23rd November respectively at 11.00 am.

A warm welcome is extended to all

Newtongrange, Scotland
Social to be held on **Saturday, 4th October 2003 at 4.00 pm**. A warm welcome is extended to all. The speaker will be announced at a later date.

Glenrothes, Scotland

Gospel meeting on **Saturday, 13th September 2003** with Russell Hill, Morley as speaker.

Kentishtown, London

132nd Anniversary meetings will be held on **Saturday 4th October 2003** when Ian Davidson, Motherwell will speak at 3.00pm and 6.00pm. We would appreciate your support at these meetings.

Ian will also speak at our services at 11 am and 6.30 pm on **Sunday, 5th October**.

Longshoot, Wigan

May 2004

Bi-annual Fellowship Weekend is to be held over weekend of **Friday, April 30th to Monday, May 3rd 2004**. A full programme of events will be announced in due course. But you can be assured of a weekend of excellent teaching and fellowship.

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