

# 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"*

## *Editorial* **Challenges to Christianity in a changing world**

Last month we looked at the issue of Intelligent Design and concluded that the concept held little appeal for the Bible-based Christian given that many proponents determinedly want to keep God out of the design equation. This month I attempt to extend the scope of my reflections on the current state of religious debate, particularly in our present materialistic Western societies. Of course in doing so, it is

important to recognize however that our experience in Western society is not necessarily reflective of the impact of the religious debate in other societies where there is far more enthusiasm for the Christian message.

It seems incontestable that the nature of religious debate has changed fundamentally during the course of the last 100 years. It has been a period during which those who do not believe in God no longer need to struggle with that rejection because there is a convenient, 'scientifically-robust' get-out in Darwinian evolutionary theory. Television and, increasingly, newer multi-media technologies have graphically projected the effects of conflicts based on religious hostility into our living rooms so that religion has become to be perceived as the cause of conflict rather than the solution to it. Increased wealth and globalisation have turned most of us into consumers faced with an overwhelming choice of ways to spend that relative wealth. Multi-culturalism has broadened our horizons through diversity, yet at the same time has re-enforced the prejudices of the less tolerant and led to tensions that, sadly, have revealed themselves in violence and sometimes hatred of others. Given the way in which life and experience has changed over that period, similar change in the religious context has been inevitable. Materialism, secularism, humanism, scientology, new-ageism, and post-modernism all have their proponents – and all of them pose a challenge to Christianity. Consider the following extract from an article on Post-Modernism.

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## **A CHANGING WORLD**

"A hundred years ago, a man living in a village in the middle of Holland (it could be England, America or any western developed country – Editor's comment) would get up in the morning, have his breakfast, go to work, come home at night, eat dinner and eventually go to bed – and never have met anybody with a lifestyle or worldview different from his own. In fact, chances were he would never meet another lifestyle or worldview in all of his life! These days, a man gets up in the morning, eats his breakfast whilst reading the newspaper, and right there encounters 10 different worldviews. He then rides the metro to work, with people who are all different than he is. At work, he sits across from a person from another country. He has lunch with a devout Greenpeace supporter. He has a business meeting with his boss who is a career-woman, a client who is a Hindustani, and a Catholic Christian. He rides the metro home, studying the advertisements on the wall, each of which is enticing him to go somewhere else, buy something else, be someone else, look like someone else... he arrives home, watches TV for 2 hours, and goes to bed. On top of the worldviews and lifestyles he has already encountered during the day, he will see another 50-100 during the 2 hours of TV. Is there a difference between today's world and the world of 100 years ago? You bet there is!"

I can see a type of what is described above very close to home. My eldest daughter is 24 years old and is a Christian. She has already visited Russia, Australasia, Thailand, Fiji, Singapore, Vietnam and a number of other countries (as well as living in Yorkshire for 3 years whilst at University!) It is an exposure to other cultures that would have been unthinkable a couple of generations ago, and yet her experiences are not untypical of her contemporaries. In addition her generation is one that has been exposed to the study of religions other than Christianity through secondary school. For many of her generation living and working with people from a variety of ethnic backgrounds is the norm – they have known nothing else. They are familiar with multi-culturalism and have grown up in an environment in which tolerance has become a by-word – tolerance of alternative lifestyles, alternative religions and sociological and family structures that would be a surprise certainly to my grand-parents' generation. It would be naïve in the extreme to expect that these experiences would not have a significant impact on the view of the world that my daughter and her contemporaries hold.

## **ABSOLUTE TRUTH – ABSOLUTELY NOT!!**

It is impossible to make absolute statements that can be sustained when we consider these issues, but the days when the fundamental core of religious debate was about the merits of the differing doctrines of the denominations have largely gone. It is not that long ago that in the United Kingdom the Christian churches played a significant role in the definition of spiritual values and the moral code. It is difficult to characterize the United Kingdom as a God-fearing, Christian country today. Of course we never all woke up one morning and suddenly realized that we lived in a materialistic, post-modern society, in which tolerance was the keyword and the notion of absolute truth had largely disappeared – the changes are too slow, imperceptible and subtle for that to ever happen. But that is precisely what has happened and the debate now centres around the rights of individuals to express themselves in any way that seems proper and satisfying to the individual, rather than any notion of behaviour that is based on spiritual or moral codes – and especially so if those moral codes are reckoned to be based on the authority of God. ***"Today there is no objective, absolute truth. Truth is what you believe it to be. Something can be 'true to you but not true to me'. Choice is the big virtue in our consumer society. And choice extends to value systems, beliefs and lifestyle choices. All are seen as equally valid. Choice of religious belief is by mix and match – whatever you feel comfortable with."***

Jan Leffel is an American, Christian philosopher. I don't know his background but he has written this and to me his words ring true. ***"When I was in college 20 years ago,***

**Christianity was under fire because it was thought to be unscientific – and consequentially untrue. Today Christianity is widely rejected not because it is critically examined and found wanting but merely because it claims to be true (my emphasis-Editor). Increasingly American academics regard claims to objective and universal truth as intolerant and unfounded.”** As I listen to debates on television and read the reflections and statements of the feature writers in our media, I conclude that it is far from just academics who hold such views – they are fast becoming common currency amongst people in general. The commonly expressed criticisms of religious belief are that it is judgmental, narrow-minded, promotes the thinking that you have the only truth, tries to enforce its values on everyone else.

## **CHRISTIANITY FACES CHALLENGES**

Edward Norman, Chancellor of York Minster, wrote a meditative and perceptive piece for the Daily Telegraph through the 1990's. In the introduction to his book, "Out of the Depths", a collection of his writings, he reflects on the state of Christianity in Britain in the early part of the new millennium. Referring to the growth of 'material humanism' he states: **"There have been numerous long-term indications that something of the sort was occurring – extending back more than a century. The basic process has been the secularisation of the culture and an astonishing internal dismantling of the faith by many of its own leaders. Humanism could always be assailed when it was the preserve of intellectuals."** (He goes on to assert that humanism found a home within Marxist philosophy). Then he continues, **"In the last 10 years or so, Marxism has blown away as an immediate threat to religious belief but has left in its place an understanding of human life which is, in its way, even more threatening to authentic spirituality. For the materialist humanism which now seems to be in the ascendancy throughout Western societies has no philosophical label by which it can be identified; it has no recognised system of ideas as its basis: it thrives on the practical appeal of welfare and rights, of enthusiasm for humanity, and an elevated estimate of the capability of society to order itself without resort to transcendent verities... Hence the impatience with religious difference – the welfare of men and women, it is contended, is far more important than mere differences over religious opinion and practice. Religion indeed is now being re-assessed as the cause of past conflict, the harbinger of superstition, the enemy of intellectual enlightenment."** Against this Norman sets the true Christian message – not a call human rights, housing benefit and reduced hospital waiting lists (worthy as they all may be), but a call for the Churches to remind people of their flawed spiritual condition.

I fully appreciate that this article has been fairly wide-ranging and has only scratched the surface of some of the influences - materialism, humanism, secularism, post-modernism and the like - that are affecting the way that the Christian message is delivered and received in 21st century Western societies. You may conclude that some of the writings that I have quoted and indeed some of my own words are mere philosophical mumbo-jumbo. However I believe we deny and ignore the fact that these influences are real and relevant at our peril. If nothing else I hope that some debate can be stimulated. I'm sure that there are pockets of growth and dynamism in our churches, and they are to welcomed with joy, but in large measure Christian churches are declining numerically, our call to come and hear the Gospel is not being heard, belief in God is characterised as retro and intellectually unenlightened.

In a book entitled "Sharing Christ with Post-Moderns", Will McReny writes: "We live in a post-modern context in which people are no longer looking to the institutional church for answers to their deep spiritual questions and needs as their grand-parents and parents did. Like Jesus depended on his disciples, the Church will become increasingly dependent upon its body to communicate its message outside the walls of the church." Are we up to the challenge?



## *The historical and cultural background to the New Testament (6)*

Ian S Davidson, Motherwell

### **THE ROMANS**

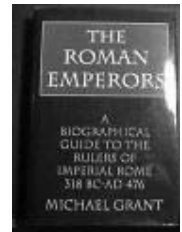
Daniel foresaw the rise of the Romans. In the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream he said: **"You, O king, are the king of kings. The God of heaven has given you dominion and power and might and glory; in your hands He has placed mankind and the beasts of the field and the birds of the air. Wherever they live, He has made you ruler over them all. You are that head of gold. After you, another kingdom will arise, inferior to yours. Next a third kingdom, one of bronze, will rule over the whole earth. Finally, there will be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron – for iron breaks and smashes everything – and as iron breaks things to pieces, so it will crush and break all the others. Just as you saw that the feet and toes were partly of baked clay and partly of iron, so this will be a divided kingdom; yet it will have some of the strength of iron in it, even as you saw iron mixed with clay. As the toes were partly iron and partly clay, so this kingdom will be partly strong and partly brittle. And just as you saw the iron mixed with baked clay, so the people will be a mixture and will not remain united, any more than iron mixes with clay."** (Daniel 2: 37-43, N.I.V.) The fourth kingdom is the Roman; the third, the Macedonian; the second, the Persian; and the first, and the greatest, the Babylonian. The first three are mentioned in the Old Testament; the fourth, in the New Testament. It was in the days of the fourth kingdom that God set up His spiritual kingdom (Daniel 2:44) - a kingdom also ruled over by a "king of kings" – Jesus Himself. The maxim of the earthly kingdoms was "might makes right". The maxim of the spiritual kingdom is "right makes might".

According to legend, Rome was founded in 753 BC by the twins Romulus and Remus. A people called the Etruscans feature in the early history of Rome. The last Etruscan king was expelled from Rome in 509 BC. Thereafter a Republic was set up and the Republican form of government lasted until 27 BC. It is an impossible task to trace every little rill and brook and stream and river that swelled the current of this mighty flood that swept the earth. Edward Gibbon in his monumental work *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* points out that: "the principal conquests of the Romans were achieved under the republic; and the emperors, for the most part, were satisfied with preserving those dominions which had been acquired by the policy of the senate, the active emulation of the consuls, and the martial enthusiasm of the people. The seven first centuries were filled with a rapid succession of triumphs...". Anyone who is interested can read of the expansion of Rome throughout Italy and their conquests of, for example, the Carthaginians (after three Punic Wars), and the Macedonians (which brought them enormous treasures and slaves). They also conquered Gaul, Spain, Germany, Southern Britain, Asia Minor (including Asia, Bithynia and Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Lycia, Pamphylia and Cilicia), Syria, Judea, Egypt, and many other countries. The Caledonians thwarted their expansion west and the Parthians fought them long and hard in the east. The Republican period of Roman history features such great names as Cato, Scipio the Younger, Hannibal, the Gracchi brothers, Julius Ceasar, Marcus Brutus, Cassius, Sulla, Pompey, Mark Anthony, Cleopatra, Virgil, Cicero, etc.

# AUGUSTUS

Octavian (later known as Augustus) became the first emperor in 27 BC. He reigned until 17 AD. Jesus was born in Bethlehem during his reign. There is a new book out on Augustus by Richard Holland. I have read it with great interest. Augustus is a fascinating character. He was always inclined to peace, although he could be ruthless when he needed to be. In his reign Roman peace (Pax Romana) extended as far as the Danube and the Black Sea. Holland writes of him: "He and his secretive, family-led organization subverted the Republic by force and fraud, making a series of offers the Senate could not refuse. He sheltered behind aliases. Whether as Caesar or Augustus, Emperor or Princeps, *Divi Filius* or just plain Gaius, the multifaceted Octavian was the Godfather of Europe." John Buchan, whose book on Augustus is not even mentioned in Holland's Select Bibliography, has written: "His character was adequate to his powers of mind, a thing unfissured, four-square, simple, wholly intelligible. He had most of the major virtues which Aristotle enumerates, but especially he had *phronesis*, that practical wisdom which is the proper attribute of the ruler.. The true achievement of Augustus is that he saved the world from disintegration. Without him Rome must have lost her conquests one by one, and seen them relapse into barbarism or degenerate into petty satrapies. The wild peoples of the East and North would have antedated their invasions by centuries. Without him a parochial Rome would have assuredly been destroyed by eternal civil war. Without him the great traditions of Hellas and Palestine would have been choked by debris, the night of the Dark Ages would have fallen sooner, and our civilization today would have lacked its most precious spiritual foundations."

The brilliant Michael Grant in his book *The Roman Emperors* said: "Augustus was a man of some literary ability, the author of a number of books... His domestic tastes were simple. Although unfaithful to his wife, Livia Drusilla, he remained deeply devoted to her. His public moral attitudes were strict, and he exiled his daughter and granddaughter for offending against these principles." Augustus was succeeded: by Tiberius (AD 14-37); Gaius (Caligula) (37-41); Claudius (41-54); Nero (54-68); Galba (68-69); Otho (69); Vitellius (69); Vespasian (69-79); Titus (79-81); Domitian (81-96); Nerva (96-98) and Trajan (98-117). The last emperor in the west was Romulus ('Augustulus') (475-6).



## ROMAN CIVILISATION

Were the Romans truly civilised? At the commencement of his book *The Early Days of Christianity* F.W. Farrar wrote: "The epoch which witnessed the early growth of Christianity was an epoch of which the horror and degradation have rarely been equalled and perhaps never exceeded, in the annals of mankind...I need but make a passing allusion to its enormous wealth; its unbounded self-indulgence; its coarse and tasteless luxury; its greedy avarice; its sense of insecurity and terror; its apathy, debauchery, and cruelty; its hopeless fatalism; its unspeakable sadness and weariness; its strange extravagances alike of infidelity and of superstition. At the lowest extreme of the social scale were millions of slaves, without family, without religion, without possessions, who had no recognised rights, and towards whom none had any recognised duties, passing normally from a childhood of degradation to a manhood of hardship, and an old age of unpitied neglect. Only a little above the slaves stood the lower classes, who formed the vast majority of the freeborn inhabitants of the Roman Empire. They were, for the most part, beggars and idlers,

familiar with the grossest indignities of an unscrupulous dependence...Their life was largely made up of squalor, misery, and vice." Then came the wealthy and the noble, whose selfish luxury is legendary. At the summit of this whole decaying system was, of course, the Emperor. Many of the emperors after Augustus grew to oppress a population which they terrified and grew to be terrified by the population which they oppressed. Some commentators blame it all on the Greeks, for they say that Rome learnt from Greece her voluptuous corruption.

One of my favourite essays by Alexander Campbell is that entitled: *Amelioration of the Social State*. It was in this essay that Campbell introduced me to the great French writer Francois Guizot. He is the author of the famous work: *The History of Civilization*. It runs to three volumes, and I found them many years ago in a second-hand bookshop in Bournemouth, England. Campbell described Guizot as "one of the ablest of the statesmen of France – one of the wisest of her philosophers." Monsieur Guizot inspired Campbell to touch upon the subject of Civilisation himself. He pointed out that "civilization is not merely intellectual culture, refinement of taste, high advances in criticism, eloquence, philosophy; nor is it eminence in the fine arts of poetry, music, painting, sculpture, architecture. The Greeks and Romans equalled, if not excelled us far, in most of these attainments; yet, compared with many of our community, they were an uncivilized and barbarous people. They lived and died under the tyranny of selfishness and terror. Their amusements, their exhibitions, their amphitheatres, their gladiator feats and pastimes were cruel, inhuman – full of lust, hatred and revenge. In fact, man, fully civilized, is wholly rescued from the tyranny of selfishness, lust, hatred, revenge, terror, cruelty, credulity and superstition." I could go on and on with this theme. Suffice to say that I think Mr Campbell would be horrified by some of the developments in our world today, especially in the so-called "civilised West". Standards are falling and are now appalling in some cases. We must remember that Rome declined and fell. Our world could too if we do not stand up for what is right and good and true.

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# BE STILL AND KNOW

## **Some thoughts on the Christian's prayer life**

**Isabel Webster, Wigan**

I'm guessing many of us would find it difficult to be asked about our prayer lives. It's a bit like being back at school and the teacher asking you how many pages you have read of your set reading book. If you see this as a chore or a 'have to' the answer will probably be not many, if any. If however she is asking you how many pages of your chosen book you have read you will probably be talking chapters, not pages.

I think we do each other a favour by admitting that we often find prayer hard. I was recently on a web-forum and someone said he found prayer difficult because of his 'butterfly brain'. It was just like someone lifting a bag of guilt from me – that's exactly how I describe my thought processes; those are the struggles I have! I wasn't alone... God wants us to be real with him. By being real with each other we have been able to support and encourage one another. Are we doing that in our

congregations? Are we looking for ways to make this vital part of our Christian lives more personal, more vibrant, more meaningful, more effective? Even the disciples asked Jesus how to pray. His response was to come to him and to learn from him. He spent many long hours alone with his Father. There was a recognizable rhythm in the life of Jesus. He would withdraw to meditate then go out to minister.

His disciples followed his example. Read this quote from Ronald Dunn: "The book of Acts is filled with prayer meetings; every forward thrust the first church made was immersed in prayer. At Pentecost they prayed ten days and preached ten minutes and three thousand people were saved. Today we pray ten minutes and preach ten days and are ecstatic if anyone is saved." Something to think about eh?

Much is talked in the world today about spirituality. For a Christian, spirituality is the essence of his relationship with God. Jesus taught us that the secret of his work wasn't his physical presence but his spiritual presence therefore his physical absence wouldn't make any difference. He even went further and said that his elevation to the right hand of God would enable us to do even greater works because of his intercession on our behalf! This is a wonderful gift we have and yet we treat it so lightly.

As always, this has to begin with ME, as in me the individual. Do I spend quality time with God? Do I feast on his word? Do I spend as much time building up my relationship with him as I do with my friends? The short answer is NO! Or it was... But I have been encouraged to rediscover the lost art of meditation. The word 'meditate' has been lost amongst all the 'new-age' spirituality. The Old Testament refers to meditation fifty-eight times. It was first used in Genesis. In Joshua, God commands Joshua to meditate on his word. This commandment is still relevant today. It helps us to:

- know God's truth and to apply that truth in our lives ( Proverbs 3 :5-6)
- feed and strengthen ourselves ( Deut. 8:3)
- gain for us an understanding of the Word ( Psalm 119:130)
- become sensitive to that 'still, small voice' that directs our path ( Psalm 119:105)
- know that our true identity is in Christ ( Galations 2:20)
- build up our faith ( Rom. 10:17)
- be healed; it reduces anxiety, tension, stress
- give our lives a deeper sense of meaning and purpose
- stand firm. It becomes part of our spiritual armour ( Eph.6:17) ( Matt. 4:4)
- focus on God rather than ourselves
- share greater intimacy with God and others

If someone offered us all this today in our frenetic world we would clamour to get this wisdom; buy the book, rent the dvd; hire the life-coach - but it's there and it's ours and it's free and there for the taking.

There are a myriad of books on the subject of prayer but a very simple book that has helped me along this path is "Into God's Presence" by Liz Babbs. I recommend it.

# Study Notes - Ministry

## New Testament words involving the idea of Ministry; i.e. SERVICE.

Submitted by Frank Worgan, Corby

- 1. Doulos – slave.** The word came to mean 'one who gives himself up to the will of another. 1 Cor. 7:33; Rom. 6:17, 20. Applied to Christians, Rom. 6: 16-18.
- 2. Oiketes – house-servant.** This illustrates a facet of the believer's relationship with the Father. See Luk.16:13; Rom. 14:4.
- 3. Misthios – hired servant.** Never directly applied to the believer, but suggests the figure of his reward in heaven, since 'misthos' is the word for 'hire' or 'reward'. Matt. 5:46; 5:12.
- 4. Pais. – Literally 'child', but also used of servants.** Matt.8: 6, 13. It is applied to the Lord Jesus as the ideal servant of God. Matt.12: 18.
- 5. Huperetes. – 'Under-rower'.** This word was used to describe a subordinate, acting under the authority of another. Luk.4: 20; John 7:32; Acts 13:5. Paul uses it of himself and his fellow servants 1st Cor.4: 1. The term itself is not directly applied to Christians, but the principle is - 1st Peter 5:5; Heb. 5:9.
- 6. Leitourgos - originally, 'one who discharges public office at his own expense'.**  
The word later came to mean, simply, a 'public servant', whether paid or unpaid. For instance, it is used of the Lord Jesus, Heb.8: 2; Angels, Heb.1: 7; Paul, Rom. 15: 15-15; Epaphroditus, Phil.2:25; and of human authorities, Rom.12: 6.
- 7. Poimaino – 'to act as a shepherd'.** Used of the Lord in Matt.2: 6. Of Elders, in acts 20:28. 1st Peter 5:2, etc. It relates to the work of tending the flock.
- 8. Diakonos – 'servant, attendant, deacon'.** The word originally described 'one who runs errands', but has come to be used of 'to serve', or 'to minister'. In the New Testament it is used extensively of:  
A specified ministry – that – i.e., the Deacons. 1st Tim.3: 8-10,12; Phil.1: 1.  
The ministry of Angels – Matt.4: 11; Mark 1:13; Heb.1:14 etc.  
Domestic service – Matt.8: 15; 25:44.  
The ministry of Hospitality – Acts 6:2; Heb.6: `10.  
The ministry of Benevolence – Rom.15: 12; Acts 11:29; 12:25.  
The ministry of the Word - Acts 6:2,4. Compare 2nd Cor. 3: 7-9.  
Discipleship generally – Luke 22:26-27.

### HENCE:

The Christian is seen as '*diakonos*' in relation to his work. '*Doulos*' in relation to his Master. '*Huperetes*' in relation to his superior. '*Leitourgos*' in relation to public service. (Vine). **Every Christian is therefore a 'minister' or 'servant'.**



The questions which we have been asked to consider this month concern that constantly recurring – and one might also say endless – source of conflict and controversy in the world's life, namely – money! The questioner asks, in essence;-



Is it wrong for Christians to accept interest?  
Is it wrong to invest in Premium Bonds?  
Is it wrong to buy National Lottery tickets?



We are, of course, discussing where the *Christian* stands in relation to these issues, in the light of New Testament principles. We are *not* discussing the attitudes of non-believers.

## ‘Usury’

In her letter, our questioner mentions the Old Testament reference to ‘*usury*’, and we begin with this word, because it has a bearing on the answer to the first of the questions.

‘Usury’ is the word found in the ‘Authorized Version’, where it is the translation of half a dozen closely related Hebrew words. It does not occur in the revised versions, where, instead, we find the word ‘*interest*’. So, ‘*usury*’ is quite simply the obsolete word for ‘*interest*’, although, it should be said that, over the years, this old word has acquired a rather unpleasant connotation and there lingers about it the suspicion of unsavoury business dealings.

## The O.T. attitude towards ‘usury’.

There are, in fact, several words, which, in the Hebrew Scriptures, are used in connection with the lending of money at interest. For instance, in Ex.22:25 we find that the children of Israel were forbidden to take interest on loans made to poor fellow-Israelites.

But this law did not apply to money lent to a ‘foreigner’, as Deut.23:19-20 plainly states, so that an Israelite incurred no guilt, if, when lending to a ‘Gentile’ he imposed an interest charge. This law was laid down prior to the entry of Israel into the land of Canaan.

Sometimes it is pointed out that the prophet Nehemiah angrily condemned those who ‘exacted usury’, in Nehemiah 5; 1-13, but when we read the prophet’s scathing words we should understand that he was not condemning the practice as *sinful in principle*. The passage reveals that his anger was directed against those of his fellow-Jews who were imposing interest on loans made to their poorer brethren, in defiance of God’s law. In other words, the prophet was warning those who behaved in this manner, that they were disobeying God.

## In the New Testament Age.

When we turn to the New Testament we find that the lending of money at interest continued to be a common legitimate practice in Jewish society. In fact, since in those days the Jews were under Roman occupation, life in Palestine reflected Roman commercial practices generally, and banking, credit and interest, were everyday realities.

In the New Testament, the English word ‘usury’ occurs only twice, and the original

Greek word – ‘*tokos*’ – has a slightly amusing meaning. It means ‘to bring forth’ – ‘birth’. You will probably recognize it as part of the word ‘*prototokos*’, which is translated ‘firstborn’ (‘*proto*’ = first, and ‘*tokos*’ = born). The thought behind ‘usury’ is that it *multiplies*, or, in other words, it ‘breeds’. In ‘usury’, then, money *begets* money!

Matt. 25:27 and Luke 19:23 are both helpful here. These are the two verses in which the word is found, and they occur in the Lord’s parable about a master who calls his servants to account for their handling of money he had given them to use on his behalf. When speaking to the ‘one talented’ servant, Jesus puts these words into the master’s mouth, “*You should have invested my money with the bankers, and, at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest*”. ‘Interest’ is the translation of the word for ‘usury’ and there is nothing in the Lord’s parable to suggest that the master was acting in an unjust or improper manner. He expected his money to have ‘worked’ for him and to have earned ‘interest’.

This illustration introduces another question which must be considered.

## **How may money be honourably obtained?**

I can think of only three basic ways:

- Firstly, it may be received as a *gift*.
- Secondly, it may be earned as *payment* for either labour or service rendered.
- Thirdly, it may be obtained *by way of barter or sale*; that is, by offering something in exchange for money.

If we look at the questions in the light of these basic principles, I think that we see that:-

### **1. To use wealth to produce ‘interest’ is perfectly legitimate and permissible.**

To put money to ‘work’ does not involve wrong-doing, proving the nature of the investment is morally acceptable. Consider this illustration. If a farmer owns a tractor or some other piece of machinery, and a neighbour asks if he may borrow it on payment of a fee – in other words, hire it - would it be wrong for the farmer to agree to this transaction? Or, if the farmer is approached by the same neighbour with a request for a financial loan, promising to repay the capital with interest, would it be wrong if he agreed to make the loan? Of course not, because both the machinery and the money are *assets* which the farmer has the right to use in a fair and honourable way. They are both ‘working’ for him.

*But let us take this a step farther.* If the farmer *deposits* his money in a ‘Savings Account’ – (and, of course, the bank will use his money in its own business transactions) - and his savings attract interest, would this be immoral? I think not, because, again, his assets are being put to work for him. This is surely what the Lord Himself implies in His parable. The one-talented man was clearly condemned because he failed to act prudently with the asset that his master had committed to him.

### **2. Now consider the ‘Premium Bond’ and the ‘Lottery’ Questions.**

Here the situation is different, because both are forms of gambling. Perhaps we should first ask the question, ‘*What is Gambling?*’ The simplest answer is that, *to gamble is to risk money on the outcome of an event, in the expectation of gaining a*

*larger sum.* In the case of 'Premium Bonds', as everyone knows the 'event' involved concerns a sequence of numbers.

According to this definition, the purchase of 'Premium Bonds' is nothing more than a modern form of gambling, because when a person invests money in the Bonds he does so knowing that the interest his investment would normally attract, will become his 'stake' and part of the collective prize-money, from which he hopes to win an amount much larger than his 'stake'.

The 'National Lottery' is an even more obvious form of gambling. Everyone surely knows that the total income from the sale of National Lottery tickets is used, first, to provide a profit for the organisers, who 'cream off' a certain percentage of the sale for whatever purposes they have in mind, leaving the remainder to be distributed as prize money.

The only major difference between the 'Premium Bond' and the 'Lottery Ticket' is that, whilst the purchaser of 'Bonds' is assured that his initial investment will remain intact, any money expended on the 'National Lottery' is a straightforward wager, from which a financial gain, whilst theoretically possible, is highly unlikely. As in most forms of gambling, the organisers risk nothing. It is always the gambler who is more likely to lose than to win! From this standpoint alone, leaving all moral and religious considerations aside, gambling is a foolhardy business.

## How do people defend gambling?

Someone will say, "I never wager more than I can afford?" But not everyone can truthfully say this, and it is an undeniable fact that there are people who are so strongly addicted to gambling that they wager all their income, causing serious hardship for their families. Children have often suffered because a father – or a mother – has become unable to control the urge to gamble, and very often, people have found themselves drowning in the debt which their addiction has created.

Just consider! Money which forms the 'National Lottery win' is often money which has been lost by people who can ill afford to lose it. Concerning gambling, Mark Twain once said, "There are two times in a man's life when he should not speculate: when he can't afford it, and when he can".

Do not expect to find a verse in the Bible that states, "Thou shalt not gamble or buy Lottery Tickets", because, as you know, it is not there. What we can find in abundance, are verses which warn us against the danger of covetousness, and just as many verses which teach us, as Christians, to depend, not on 'luck' or 'chance', but on the care and providence of our heavenly Father. Remember that the Lord Jesus said:

- "Your heavenly Father knows what you need before you ask Him". Matt.6:8.
- Heb.13:5, "Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have."
- 1st Tim. 6:8, "Having food and clothing, let us be content".
- 1st Tim. 6:6, "There is great gain in godliness with contentment."

But may I suggest that you read, and think about, 1st Tim. 6:6-10? There is a blessing in these verses for every one of us – whoever we are.

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Or, Frank@fworgan0.wanadaoo.co.uk**

# Jesus, the Cross and sin-bearing

Ernest Makin, Wigan

There follows some small observations on the significance of the cross. These are not meant to be comprehensive for who can compose an exhaustive understanding of the significance of the cross? **"We know that our old self was crucified with Him so that the body of sin might be done away with and that we should no longer be slaves to sin."**

Fellowship with the death of Jesus is a spiritual gift of significant personal magnitude and a life changing experience. **"Here is a trustworthy saying: if we died with Him, we shall live with him."** A tremendous responsibility lies with the Christian and that is to reveal the life of Jesus in our mortal body and to reject what the world projects as its 'basic rules'. Read Colossians 3 and note Paul's instruction to put on the "new self" which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. This will lead to the gift of eternal life and we are told that this is **"eternal life, that you may know the only true God and Jesus the Christ whom God has sent"**.

## Crucified with Christ

The cross, a historical event attested to by both contemporary believers and adverse witnesses, brings all the dynamics of the love of God to fruition. Its consequences are multi-purpose, but one purpose is that **"having died to sin we might live to righteousness"**. Our old man because of its deceitful lusts grows corrupt. Paul instructs the Ephesian Christians to be renewed in the spirit of their minds and to put on the new man. Yes, the worldly man must be replaced by the spiritual man. God has designed the new man in holiness, righteousness and with a desire to develop his knowledge of Jesus. The gospel appeals to its hearers to identify with the crucifixion of the Christ by immersion into water in the name of Jesus. This action, an indication that one believes that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, is a spiritual death - a metaphorical crucifixion of our worldly self. In beautiful metaphorical language the immersion of a believer in water implies identification with the death of Jesus and, just as Jesus was raised from the dead by the glory of God, the believer in turn will rise to walk in newness of life. Destroy the credibility of the cross and the whole edifice of the Church of the Christ will crumble. Doctrines of major and eternal life-saving import will become meaningless if the detractors of Jesus crucifixion have their opinions enthroned in the minds of men. Reconciliation to God, substitutionary sacrifice for sin, justification of the believer, mediation by the Christ and victory over death will all become meaningless if the majesty of the cross is reduced.

## Seven sayings on the Cross

The seven sentences uttered by Jesus on the tree combine to portray in graphic, moving and awe-inspiring fashion, in the midst of man's hideous inhumane treatment of the Son of God and Man, all that Jesus was and is and will be. The love of an

omnipotent God, whose essence of love spills over into the blood of His Son, rises in majestic splendour on Calvary and is a plea for all men to turn to Jesus. On this insignificant mound outside Jerusalem, the love story of all the ages culminated in the words of the crucified itinerant preacher from Nazareth. At Calvary the Son of God/Son of Man forgave his enemies; offered salvation to a penitent thief; showed deep affection for a grieving mother and a loved disciple; suffered physical torment; in deep abhorrence for having to drink the cup of Gethsemane he overtly reminded the observers of his passion, that he was divine, by quoting from a messianic psalm; and finally in deep extremis He triumphantly finished His redemptive work and obediently, and in deep trust, committed His spirit to his Father who had sent him to die.



The cross was a place of substitution for all sinners. Jesus, voluntarily, suffered the punishment that everyone, other than he, deserves. Jesus has revealed himself as “the bread of life”, all that is necessary for man’s spiritual existence. He said that “the bread of life” was His flesh, which he would give for the world. Here is yet another prophetic statement pointing towards Calvary and telling forth that the provision of eternal life for the believer would be costly. The Samaritans used a phrase (found in John 4:42 and 1 John 4:14) **“the Saviour of the World”**. John and the other envoys had seen and testified that “The Saviour of the World” had been sent by the Father. Is not this an all-consuming expression of love for those lost in the worldly corruption of deceitful lust? Paul informs the Roman Christians that the Mosaic Law was powerless in overcoming sin. Such Law could identify sin and even stimulate sin in man, but it could not remove sin, nor rescue man from the power of sin. **“In the likeness of sinful man”**, the Christ became human, but unlike all others. Although he faced temptation and trials, He remained sinless. Yet **“God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God”**. The perfect righteousness of Jesus covers our corrupt nature and imperfections. When we obediently believe, obeying His commandments, we voluntarily exchange our former self, and sin, for the new man and his righteousness. This is the atoning nature of the cross. Within the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus there lies an immeasurable, never ending amount of “right-making” spiritual currency. When we believe, we exchange our worldly, corrupt currency for His currency of love, righteousness, holiness and knowledge. This is a currency freely provided by the beneficence of an all-loving heavenly Father and grounded deep in the hillside at Calvary.

## Righteousness through faith

In a towering statement recorded in Romans 3:21-31, Paul writes about righteousness through faith in Jesus. Paul states that all, Gentile and Jew, are unrighteous. However the wonderful news is that even though we fall short of the glory of God, justification is freely available by the grace of God. When God presented Jesus as a sacrifice of atonement he was demonstrating his justice. The fundamental clause in the justification of the sinner i.e. making it possible for the obedient sinner to be declared righteous and innocent, is that although we deserve to be convicted

of guilt before God, freely, and by His grace, we may share in the righteousness of Jesus. In the language of the courtroom the verdict has been delivered; the Judge has fixed the sentence; and the penalty has been paid for all time by the shedding of the blood of Jesus on Calvary.

This sacrifice is legally valid because Jesus lived a life of perfect sinlessness. That righteousness can now be imputed to the believer. The righteous nature of Jesus will be 'credited' to believers as their own nature. Please read Romans 4 in which Paul uses the word credited 9 times. The word has in it the idea of measurement and this concept is underlined when Paul states: **"Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered; blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never COUNT against him."** God does not credit unrighteousness (which may what is deserved) to the repentant sinner, but forgives him who confesses that Jesus is Lord and God with all its concomitant consequences. God forbore the sins of mankind before the cross and until the redemptive work of the Christ was triumphantly finished. Now through an obedient faith in Jesus he justifies, declares innocent, both Jew and Gentile through the redemption that came through Jesus the Christ. The cross is the place of justification and it makes possible for God to "gift" to those who believe a righteousness that is the express image of the righteousness of Jesus.

When Jesus uttered the words "it is finished" as he hung in torment on the cross, he had fulfilled all that the Father had sent him to do. Now his suffering could be made perfect by his envoys preaching the gospel of reconciliation. The redemptive work of Jesus had reached a successful and majestic conclusion. **"The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and give His life a ransom for many."** Three times Jesus had predicted his suffering and death. Jesus now explains the purpose of his death. **"The Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law having become a curse for us; for it is written 'cursed be everyone who hangs on a tree'".** The text uses the metaphor of the slave market. The sinner in thrall or bondage to sin is bought back, redeemed by the ransom price, fixed by God and obediently and lovingly paid by Jesus at tremendous cost. The action of buying back contains the concept of setting the subject free. The word that is translated 'ransom' is **'antilutron'**, a compound word whose prefix 'anti' signifies a substitution. This would support the nature of Jesus' substitutionary sacrifice as outlined in 2 Cor. 5:21, Romans 8:3 and John 6:51. The person who owns the slave accepts the payment as a substitute for his property, which now becomes the property of the payee i.e both God and Jesus. **"Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own. For you were bought at a price, therefore glorify God in your body and your spirit, which belong to God."** Paul further writes: **"For he who is called in the Lord while a slave is the Lord's freedman. Likewise he who is called while free is Christ's slave. You were bought at a price so do not become slaves of men."**

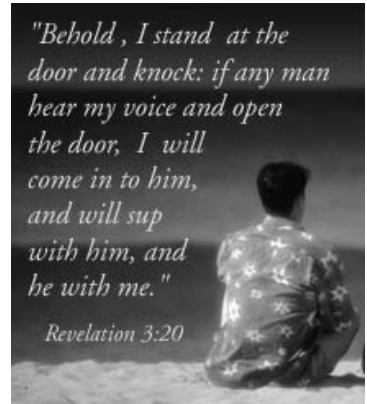
## The new and better way

Jesus is the mediator of a new and better agreement made by God and this agreement provides freely given gifts:

- Believers will receive redemption from sin which they committed under the law, and this forgiveness is based on divine forbearance;
- Like the Israelites, Gentile believers will receive an eternal inheritance.

When the Israelites returned from exilic captivity in Babylon they entered Zion with gladness and singing praises to the glory of God. Isaiah writes about "the way of holiness" in similar context and paints a significant picture of the way of the redeemed. **"The redeemed will walk along the way of holiness and the ransomed of the Lord will return, they will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads and joy will overtake them and sorrow and sighing will flee away."**

Perhaps we have here a prophetic word picture of the redeemed of the Lord entering their eternal home. John, on the Isle of Patmos, could speak as an exile as he was afforded a remarkable vision of the New Jerusalem. "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be His people and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain for the old order of things has passed away."



*"Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."*

*Revelation 3:20*

The meaning and implication of the Cross of Christ underpins the glad tidings of salvation and has been preached for over 2000 years and will remain as efficacious now and in the future as it was when Jesus was cruelly hung on the tree. All the fundamental doctrines of the Word of God are based on the historically solid foundation of the cross. This brief appraisal has not made mention of how perfect sacrifice removes God's punishment from those who believe (propitiation); nor how the cross is a place of reconciliation – God reconciling the sinner to Himself and the Gentile to the Jew. We could have considered in detail the cross as a place of ending and, paradoxically, as a place of beginning. The sacrifice of Jesus ended the necessity for all other sacrifice for sin; and the blood of Jesus, so copiously shed from Gethsemane to Calvary, marks the beginning of the blood bought bride of Christ, His Church. Perhaps above all we should regard Calvary as a place of victory.

**"Now is the time for judgement on the world, now the prince of the world will be driven out. But I when I am lifted up will draw all men to myself. He said this to show the kind of death He was going to die."**

My prayer is that you will consider the claims of the cross of the Christ on your valued life and accept through obedient faith the immeasurable and remarkable free gifts, which are available from a loving heavenly Father. All believers may follow the example Paul cites (Galatians 2:20):

**"I am crucified with the Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I but the Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."**

## News and Information

### **Ghana Appeal**

Contributions to the Fund are distributed with care and priorities are considered carefully. Evangelism continues and many are responding to teaching of the Gospel. Not only is the size of individual churches increasing, but new congregations continue to be established. As these are often widespread and remote from the evangelising church, there is considerable travelling involved to enable the teaching to continue. One brother is continually visiting four widespread infant churches over difficult terrain. This is expensive and he needs help with travelling costs.

Some, coming out of idolatry, have to accept changes to their lifestyle, such as realising that a Christian man can have no more than one wife.

There are numerous reports of snake-bites among brethren who survive by growing food on a patch of ground. Provision of suitable protection, such as Wellington boots, is difficult for them and it would be good to show our concern by providing these.

We thank brethren who have contributed to this Fund and plead that it continues. So much has been achieved – and the potential is so great.

Those wishing to help, please make cheques payable to: **Dennyloanhead Church of Christ Ghana Fund** and send to treasurer, **Mrs. Janet Macdonald, 12 Charles Drive, Larbert, Falkirk, Stirlingshire. FK5 3HB Tel: 01324 562480**

## Coming Events

### **Stretford, Manchester**

The Church meeting in Stretford invites you to a special Saturday Meeting in the Green Hut, 538 Kings Road, Stretford, Manchester.

Meeting at 7.00pm.

The talk will be followed by light refreshments and discussion.

**November 19th –**

*Speaker:* Mark Hill, Loughborough.

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