

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 Tolerance - virtue or vice?

One of the issues that has dominated comment both within and beyond religious circles over the last few months is that of religious tolerance (or should it be religious intolerance). In the United Kingdom we latterly have an Act of Parliament that attempts to deal with, amongst other things, incitement to religious hatred within a legal framework. It is an enormously complex issue that has become as much a matter of social cohesion given our multi-cultural and multi-faith society as a matter of religious debate. Of course religious intolerance is as old as mankind and there is no doubt that serious conflicts have

occurred and continue to occur founded on the divisiveness of different 'faiths'. Professor Steven Dawkin has used this, probably successfully in the eyes of many, to contend that religion, indeed God Himself, is 'the root of all evil'. The new element that has brought the discussion into sharper focus is the growth of international terrorism and the effect that the 'faith' connotation within it has on social unrest.

INTOLERANT REACTIONS

Perhaps the very idea of tolerance leaves any group of people with a particular approach to an issue in the horns of a dilemma. For example, some Animal Rights activists cannot 'tolerate' the use of animals for experimentation in medical research and have taken their intolerance of such use to extremes by carrying out violent and threatening acts against institutions operating in that field and against individuals who work for those institutions. For some people this is a sign of their dedication to the cause; for others it is an objectionable way to pursue one's ideals. The former group would perhaps argue that to 'tolerate' actions that they believe are wrong is to go some way towards legitimising them or compromising their beliefs, whilst the latter group might argue that there has to be a more constructive and civilized way of dealing with differences, however passionately those views are held.

The recent publication across Europe of the cartoons depicting Mohammed as a terrorist has caused serious, albeit localized, disruption and violence because it offended what is apparently one of the most sacred tenets and deeply held beliefs of the Muslim faith - that is, that all depictions of Mohammed are forbidden; in some parts of the Muslim community that was seen to be an intolerable affront to their faith. Some Christians too have reacted furiously and with violence against the property of certain clinics, especially in the United

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States, that offer abortion services. Again, it is such an intolerable affront to their understanding of the sanctity of human life that it justifies an extreme reaction. There is little doubt that some Christians will argue, perhaps with justification, that the majority of us in 'progressive' western societies accept far too easily the indignities and blasphemies that are so regularly and cruelly visited upon the person and character of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ and that however much such words and actions cause us personal hurt, our public reaction to them is too muted.

At some point when these issues are debated the question of 'freedom of speech' will be raised and the right to freedom of speech will be invoked. That in itself is a dilemma because no individual or organization can properly insist on freedom of speech when it suits their own purpose but deny it when their purpose is not being served, however much we would like that to be the case. That's hypocritical. We rightly value the freedom that we have to preach the Gospel (a right that is denied to some Christians around the world) but consistency says that whilst ever we take advantage of that right we must not be intolerant of the right of others to express views that we may disagree with. Some people (and journalists seem to be at the forefront of this – see the cartoon issue above) argue that in a modern society the 'right to offend' should be accepted though there can only ever be limited scope in this direction before the need for responsibility and sensitivity kicks in.

TOLERANCE IN THE CHURCH

It has been invaluable to toss these thoughts around to sharpen personal thoughts about how we interact within the context of our Christian communities. An intolerant community is one that will eventually become several smaller communities. The inability or unwillingness to tolerate views and opinions different from our own has, of course, been the cause of so much division within religious communities of all types. The dilemma that we all face when considering these matters can perhaps be expressed like this: **intolerance** of others views will lead to division but **tolerance** will lead to compromise. It's arguable that both routes ultimately lead to weakness. The real question is whether the choice has to be so stark or indeed whether there is genuine strength in a tolerant community.

In one of our recent Bible study meetings the attendees were asked to answer yes or no about a number of issues that have a bearing on our faith. On the vast majority of questions opinion was divided to a greater or lesser degree. Some of the issues were quite fundamental and I am sure that we will go on debating and discussing them for a long time to come without achieving a state of uniformity. Can we, indeed should we, live comfortably with such a situation?

Of course we can and we do it first and foremost by remembering and valuing what unites us. Unity is not something that we, the members of the body of Christ achieve, it is a gift that we have as a result of our adoption by God into his family because ultimately we are united in Christ. Second, we also resolve that we will continue to study God's word and be open-minded and honest as we seek out a greater understanding of God's word. And we resolve that love, patience and a desire for the common good will take precedence over bitterness and self-indulgence. It is not the absence of differences that reveals the quality and maturity of a society or a Christian community, but rather how those differences are dealt with as and when they arise. Is the greater maturity shown by the person who stands and denounces his 'opponent' at every opportunity or the person who at every opportunity carefully, patiently and purposefully states his beliefs and seeks the route of persuasion in challenging others views? In the Christian context as well, "Jaw, jaw is better than war, war".

We make a mistake to equate tolerance with agreement or condonation. We have to tolerate the fact, for example, that there are several expressions of religious faith within the countries that we live in and we have to tolerate that because we do not have the power to change it. We may not like it; we may not agree with how others express their religious faith; we may not condone some or other of their beliefs and practices. Our task is to remain faithful to what we understand to be God's revelation, to create and take opportunities to 'earnestly contend for the faith', and to seek to persuade others to our way of thinking not as a demand, but through force of argument, example and commitment to what we hold dear. **"So faith comes by what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ."**



The historical and cultural background to the New Testament (11)

Ian S Davidson, Motherwell

I often wonder what life would be like if I were transported back to New Testament times. What would immediately strike me? I think the following: the unfamiliar clothing; the strange languages; the foreign food and drink; the lack of transportation; the temples dedicated to all sorts of gods; no church buildings; lack of electricity; animal sacrifices; the abundance of slaves; no watches; a different calendar; the use of scrolls; Roman rule; curious architecture; exotic smells; numerous Jews; basic amenities; funny money; odd music; peculiar religious observances; the schooling methods; unfamiliar games; basic hygiene; quack remedies; huge public baths; blood sports; amusing hair styles; Emperor worship; the large numbers of poor people; the idle rich; the individual shops; limited communication; political corruption; the cruelty and violence; etc. I could go on and on. The world, of course, has moved on since then and we pride ourselves in the sophistication of modern society. But the basic problems are still with us, especially, the problem of sin.

PEOPLE THEN AND NOW

People are the same everywhere. We have much in common with those who lived in the past. They were troubled by many of the things that concern us: the meaning of life; war and peace; love and marriage; family life; jobs; financial security; crime; political competence; justice; morality; religious truth; the environment; care in old age; death; and anything else, dear reader, you wish to add. Many people struggled to survive, just as many do today. But, clearly, we live in a more affluent age and the love of money is still a root of all kinds of evil. The worship of Mammon is everywhere. Jesus once said: "You cannot serve God and mammon." (Matthew 6:24b; Luke 16:13b).

EXAMPLES OF CULTURAL DIFFERENCES FROM THE GOSPELS

But let us return to some of the cultural differences and consider some examples from the gospel records. Jesus said: "And whosoever shall compel you to go a mile, go with him two." (Matthew 5:41) In Jesus' day, Palestine was an occupied country. A Roman soldier, for example, could force a Jewish citizen to guide or carry for him. So the individual had to do it, but usually he did it with great bitterness and resentment. Jesus now looked for each of His followers to undertake such a task in the opposite spirit – the spirit of cheerfulness and grace. He also looked for the disciple "to go the extra mile". Think of the impact such an action would have upon a pagan Roman.

We read: "And upon this came his disciples, and marvelled that He talked with the woman..." (John 4: 27a) In these days rabbis did not converse with a woman, let alone a Samaritan woman. William Barclay has pointed out that "Rabbis so despised women and so thought them incapable of receiving any real teaching that they said: 'Better that the words of the law should be burned than to deliver to women'. They had a saying: 'Each time that a man prolongs converse with a woman he curses evil to himself, and desists from the law, and in the end inherits Gehinnom'. Jesus broke the convention and took the barriers down. The Master, during His ministry, challenged all sorts of absurd conventions around at the time. He really was a controversialist in His day, but for all the right reasons.

Leprosy is a terrible disease. Following diagnosis, lepers were completely banished from human society. Actually, they were treated "as if they were dead men". (Flavius

Josephus) In an open place, it was illegal to greet a leper. If a leper so much as put his head in a house then that house became completely unclean. A leper had to keep his distance – four cubits on a normal day; but one hundred cubits if the wind was blowing in the wrong direction. We read: "And behold, there came a leper and worshipped Him, saying, Lord, if you will, you can make me clean. And Jesus put forth his hand and touched him, saying, I will; be you clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed. And Jesus said unto him; See you tell no man; but go your way, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them." (Matthew 8: 2-4). Again, Jesus broke the conventions of His day.

A Jewish wedding was an interesting affair. The actual ceremony took place at night. After the ceremony the couple were conveyed to their new home. There was no immediate honeymoon. They stayed in the house for a week in which there was continuous feasting and rejoicing. The happy couple were treated as royalty throughout. For the actual wedding, the bridegroom could turn up at any time to the house of the bride. Indeed, very often a groom tried to surprise the bridal party by turning up unexpectedly. So the bridal party had to be ready at all times day and night. If people had to venture out in the dark for the welcome then, by tradition, they could not go out without a lighted lamp. Once the bridegroom had arrived, the door was shut and latecomers were not admitted. In the light of these comments a further study of the Parable of the Ten Virgins (Matthew 25: 1-13) could prove profitable.

We read: "And no man puts new wine into old bottles: else the wine bursts the bottles, and the wine is spilled, and the bottles will be marred: but new wine must be put into new bottles." (Mark 2:22). The Greek word for bottle is *askos* and refers to a leather bottle or a wineskin. W.E. Vine has written: "A whole goatskin, for example, would be used with the apertures bound up, and when filled, tied at the neck. They were tanned with acacia bark and left hairy on the outside. New wines, by fermenting, would rend old skins." So we see that there is no reference here to glass bottles. But what was the point Jesus was trying to make? "To impose upon this new situation of the gospel the religious observances of the old Judaism is as incongruous as applying a patch of new-made cloth to an old garment, or pouring unfermented wine into hard, inelastic wineskins, and as disastrous in its results." (C. E. Graham Swift).



In the Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen (mentioned in all three synoptic gospels) Jesus spoke of a hedged vineyard, a winepress and a tower. (Matthew 21:33; Mark 12:1; Luke 20:9) Vineyards were important money-earners in these days. The hedge would be a thorn hedge to keep out wild animals and thieves. The winepress consisted of two troughs, one higher than the other. The latter collected the pressed wine via a channel from the first. The tower served two purposes: as a watchtower to deter thieves and a place of lodging for those who worked in the vineyard. Absent landlords were also not uncommon in Jesus' time. "Scope of the parable: the Jews to be rejected as a people, on account of their rejecting and killing God's prophets, and finally His own Son." (Robert Milligan)

Jesus spoke of Corban in a scathing attack upon the Pharisees and the scribes. (Mark 7:11) What precisely was Corban? Corban or Korban was a gift offered to God. These Jews were declaring that they could not help their parents because their property was the subject of a vow and, therefore, sacred to God. Jesus knew that the vow was made an excuse to avoid doing what the Law actually commanded. Their actions were disgraceful and inexcusable. No wonder the Master castigated them for invalidating the word of God by their tradition.

The ‘Quasi-trials’ of Jesus the Christ

(Ernest Makin, Wigan)

PART 4

“ROMAN ILLEGALITIES IN THE TRIAL OF JESUS?”

**“Take Him yourselves and judge Him by your own law.
I find no basis for a charge against Him.”**

Roman involvement in the arrest and interrogation of Jesus appears to begin in the Garden of Gethsemane. **“Then the detachment (*speira* or *cohort* – approximately two hundred men) of soldiers with its commander (*chilliarch* – the equivalent at least of a colonel and in charge of one thousand men) and the Jewish officials (*hupertes* – that is, underrowers or specific servants) arrested Jesus.”**



The Jewish officials were bailiffs of the Sanhedrin, usually drawn from the Levites. This was the Temple police force, the *shoterim*. A *chilliarch* as defined above was a senior ranking Roman officer. It would seem that the Roman contingent in the arrest party was quite large. At this stage, for Rome to be involved in what was clearly a Jewish theological wrangle fuelled by the intense animosity of the priests and elders, now becomes a politico/theology plot. I would argue strongly that this brings into sharp relief the distinct possibility of Judeo/Roman collusion orchestrated by Annas and Caiaphas, whose demonic and machiavellian influence even entangled a weak and unpopular Roman Governor in their web of a premeditated plot to murder Jesus. What begins as an expedient plan to rid Jerusalem of a religious inconvenience before the advent of the Passover is now firmly placed in the political arena by the early involvement of military servants of Rome.

“I FIND NO FAULT IN HIM”

When Jesus was first arraigned (though this is perhaps too legalistic a term) before Pilate, the Jews were asked by Pilate to signify what charge had brought Jesus to the Roman Governor. In a somewhat brusque and peevish manner the prejudice of the Jews showed clearly in their answer: **“If he were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered him up to you.”** What at this stage had happened to the charge of blasphemy? Pilate would never have ordered death on the basis of such a theological charge. The accusation that the Jews brought was so lacking in specificity that it should have been dismissed there and then by Pilate. In answer to the claim of Jesus that he ‘was witness to the truth’, Pilate asks the question that is so often repeated – ‘What is truth?’

Is this a disdainful and contemptuous Roman reaction indicating that there is no such thing as abstract truth? Did Pilate allow his cynicism to come to the conclusion that there was never any possibility of arriving at the truth because of the scheming of the Jewish leaders? Or was he expressing a wish that, somehow, someone would tell him the truth? Whatever he meant, Pilate hit upon the truth but shamefully failed to act upon it when he said, **“I find no fault in him at all.”** This was a conclusion restated by Pilate on two more occasions when he declared, **“Behold I am bringing him to you that you may know that I find no fault**



in him,” and again, “you take him and crucify him for I find no basis for a charge against him.”

So Jesus had to face the flagellum despite the fact that the supposedly most authoritative voice in Jerusalem had declared him to be innocent. The interrogation, the pursuit of the murder of Jesus should have been abandoned there and then. As a Christian I find a sad but exultant joy in the fact that despite the prejudiced inhumanity shown to Jesus, the redemptive work of Jesus found its tortured way through all of the machinations of these historical figures. I never lose sight of the fact that very often, out of that which man makes evil, God produces good. Out of the sufferings and death of Jesus, God illustrated His glorious power by the resurrection of the Lord to his ‘spiritual body’, and provided for the faithful followers of Jesus the reality that they too would ultimately enjoy such blessings: **“Behold I show you a mystery, we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. In a moment in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption and this mortal must put on immortality.”** Please read 1 Corinthians 15 and thank God for His grace toward us sinners. The treatment of Jesus prior to His death was a mockery of justice and added insult to illegality. Unwarranted physical attacks on the body of Jesus began in front of Annas and continued in front of, and at the hands of, His Roman tormentors: “The soldiers twisted a crown of thorns and put it on His head, and they put on Him a purple robe. Then they said, ‘Hail King of the Jews’, and they struck Him with their hands.” Such humiliating treatment was no part of a legally based interrogation and bore no relationship to justice.

POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Pilate’s refusal to end the charade and, at the other extreme to scourge Jesus and invite the Jews to crucify him, illustrates at the very least a weak, vacillating manner; or at worst his actions indicate an increasing complicity in Jewish malpractice and a malicious and vengeful attempt to destroy Jesus. Whatever Pilate’s reasons for his words and behaviour, they were cruelly wrong and misguided. Appointed by Tiberias in AD 26, Pilate’s procuratorship was, by AD 30/33, being questioned in Rome (he was eventually removed from office in AD 36). Any further infraction of Roman rule by Jewish civil unrest would have further damaged the Governor’s reputation and his personal ambition would lie in tatters. Hence there was an unjust, almost criminal, desire to please the Jewish theocracy and its vociferous supporters. Although Pilate sought to set Jesus free, his fear of damaging personal consequences overruled any inclination towards justice for Jesus, and resulted in his final shameful capitulation to the malicious demands of the Jews. **“He (Pilate) was even more afraid... finally he handed Him over to them to be crucified.”**

A further Roman indignity was the attempt by Pilate to pass the responsibility for any action to Herod Antipas, the tetrarch of Galilee. Jesus of course was himself a Galilean. Pilate had found no basis whatsoever for a charge to be laid at the door of Jesus but instead of an acquittal he chose to have him tried again by Herod. Other political motives were no doubt involved in this decision. The confrontation between Herod and Jesus may be read in Luke 23: 6-12.

Jesus initially had been brought to Pilate charged with blasphemy, a charge that according to Jewish law is punishable by one of four types of execution. These are by burning, strangulation, beheading or stoning (note the case of Stephen recorded in Acts 7). The Caiaphas group felt that they needed permission to execute, and it is recorded that they considered themselves not to have the right to execute anyone.

They therefore presented Jesus to Pilate as a criminal and then orchestrated the angry crowd into demanding crucifixion. If Jesus was guilty as charged by the Sanhedrin, they should have demanded permission from Pilate to stone Jesus. However the imprecise charge that loosely stated, "if he were not a criminal we would not have handed him over to you" should have resulted in his acquittal. Pilate illegally shirked his responsibility as chief power in Jerusalem.

THE CHRIST TRIUMPHANT

Everyone involved in this travesty of justice behaved with an unnatural, inhumane and antagonistic desire to have Jesus killed or punished to please the crowd. They did not realise at all that God, through Jesus, was in total control of a developing redemptive situation. Jesus had previously said in the hearing of the Jews, "**and I if I am lifted up from the earth I will draw all peoples to myself. This he said signifying what death he would die.**"

And yet despite the scheming and illegal actions of the Jews and despite the dereliction of duty and illegality of the Roman actions there arose out of these trials of Jesus a glorious reality that transcends time: "**And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness even so must the Son of Man be lifted up that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.**"

COME ON OVER

When the ties to our former life - due to careers, the death of elderly relatives, children leaving home - are no longer binding, perhaps it is easy to start thinking (as many do) of moving on to pastures new, especially when we have friends or family who have done the same and are already saying "Come on over - it's great out here!"

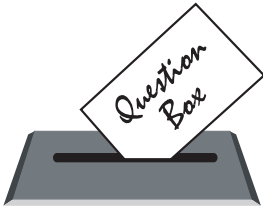
As Christians, we need to ask ourselves if we are doing the same bidding for those who need to "come on over" to Christ. Does our daily living and attitude say, "It's great over here"? Do our words about church members convey a community in harmony? Do our choices of activities reflect our commitments to live in the community of Christ?

Could our testimonial appear in a brochure to get someone to move into our church community? There are many days I don't like the answers to these questions.

When people relocate geographically it's usually to make life better. Better job (or retirement), milder climate, quality schools, closer to loved ones.

Should we expect people to relocate from a life that's lost to a life in Christ with less amenities? Well in a way, Yes! We are to give up our lives and follow Christ. We know we will have trials when we follow him. He told us so. But we also need to make our community a place where people want to come and feel loved and accepted. We need to "encourage one another and build each other up", according to Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:11; to help each other grow in faith; to offer a soft place to fall, a shoulder to cry on, and sometimes even a word of admonishment spoken with love.

Susan McGrath



QUESTION – Many Christians believe they will be judged by God on “Judgment Day”. If that is so, how was Paul able to confidently assert, ‘henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord...will award me on that Day’? Was Paul pre-judging himself?”



This is the subject and the question about which we have been asked to think about this month. The quotation referred to, as you will doubtlessly know, is from 2nd Timothy 4:7.

The Opening Statement.

Let us begin with the opening statement in the first sentence. My immediate response, upon reading it, was, “*If this is really what ‘many Christians’ believe, they are very greatly mistaken!*” and our task must be to try to dispel, once and for all, the trepidation that some Christians feel when ‘Judgment Day’ is mentioned.

The ‘Day’

We need to ask ourselves to *which* ‘Day’ Paul was referring, because the word is used in different contexts. Was he thinking about the ‘Day’ on which God will “judge the world in righteousness’ by the One whom He has appointed?” (Acts 20:31). Or, the ‘Day’ on which he, as a servant of Christ, must *give an account of his stewardship* to his Lord? (1st Cor. 3:13)

You see, there is a difference between the two Days. One relates to sin and salvation, and therefore, concerns the unsaved world. The other ‘Day’ specifically concerns the saints, and *only* the saints, and the relationship they have with their Lord.

Human and Divine Judgment.

I think it is a pity that much of the confusion about ‘Judgment Day’ has arisen because our thinking about ‘*The Judgment*’ is undoubtedly shaped and coloured by what we know about human judgment. But, whilst it is true that there are aspects of human and Divine judgment that are very similar, there are also significantly great differences. Without going into great detail, let me point out that the similarities are obvious. In a human Court of Law we have:

- > The Judge, before whom Evidence is offered.
- > The Accused and the Accusation – the Charge.
- > The Pronunciation of the Verdict reached on the basis of that evidence.
- > The Passing of the Sentence, if the verdict is ‘Guilty’!

Similarly, according to Rev. 21, when the Final Court convenes, on what we know as ‘The Day of Judgment’, there will also be:

- > The Judge. “The Throne and Him who sat upon it.” v.11
- > The Accused. All those who are to be judged, “the dead, small and great.” v.12-13.
- > The Production of the Evidence, “the books were opened.” v.12
- > The Passing of the Sentence.

The major and most significant difference is that, whilst in the earthly Court the evidence must be thoroughly weighed before a verdict is passed, on the ‘Day of Judgment’ that will not be necessary, because it will not be a ‘Judgment’ day in the **human sense of the**

word. No need for 'witnesses for the prosecution', or for the defence.

God's purpose will *not* be to decide, on that occasion, whether those who stand before Him are innocent or guilty, righteous or unrighteous, saved or lost, because this was settled for every one of them, at the moment of death, having been determined by their response to the offer of forgiveness, made in the Gospel. Those who die without the assurance of salvation offered in the Gospel, will die in a lost state. Those who die, having accepted Christ as Saviour and have lived according to that faith, will die in a saved state and will have no need to fear when '*the books are opened*' (Rev. 20:12-13), because their names are enrolled in '*the Lamb's Book of the Living*'.

Having already been judged and acquitted in the person of the Lord Jesus, they will not again stand trial for their life.

No 'Double Jeopardy'

It is written in the law of our country that a person, having been once been acquitted, may not be tried again for the same offence. Let me therefore ask you to think about this. Is it not true that, because we are followers of the Lord Jesus, our sins were carried "**in His own body on the cross?**" (1st Pet. 2:24) Did He not receive, in Himself, the penalty for sin that we deserved to receive? (Rom.5:25)

And is it not also true that when God looks at us, He sees us *already clothed with our Saviour's righteousness?* (Phil.3:9) This is a truth to which we should hold fast. **God will not require atonement for our sins, first at the hand of Jesus, and then again from us.** The redemption price has already been paid! The debt has been cancelled. Freedom has already been purchased. In the Lord Jesus we have *already* been tried and justified. And there can be no double jeopardy! **God will not require the price for our sin twice; first at our Saviour's hand and then again at ours.**

The Abiding Efficacy of the Sacrifice.

Perhaps you are thinking that when we obeyed the Gospel, the blood of Christ dealt only with the guilt of our past. But that is not so. The efficacy of His blood is both retrospective and prospective. It covers the past, the present and the future, because He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, and His blood effectively deals with the sins of all those who, in every age, past, present and in the future, live by faith.

Pardon for the Believer.

We recognize, of course, that none of us is perfect and we all sin, even though we are Christians. For this reason, the scriptures contain what we may call '*the second law of pardon*', which God has provided as the way of dealing with the daily sins of His children. **"If we confess our sins, He who is faithful and just will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."** (1st John 1; 9) Belief of the Gospel and obedience is the law of pardon for the sinner. Confession of daily sin is law of pardon for the saint. This means that the faithful Christian is able to remain in a constant state of grace and does not need to fear the future.

Why, then, 'The Day of Judgment'?

It is here that we see the uniqueness of God's Day of Judgment. I describe it as 'unique' because there has never been, nor will there ever be again, an event like it. It will be convened, not to decide the eternal destinies of those who appear before Him on that day, because, as I have already stated, that decision is made during earthly life.

There is a well-known saying which is very appropriate in dealing with our subject. It states, "*Justice must not only be done; it must be seen to be done.*" When '*the books*' are

opened before God, it will not be because God needs to be reminded what men have done in their lives, or because He needs to weigh up the evidence, for or against them. It will be in order that every individual may know and understand clearly, why God's verdict is just and the sentence deserved.

None who are banished eternally from God's Presence will be left in any doubt as to the reason. None will be able to say, 'I don't deserve this!' Or, 'I don't understand why I am being treated in this way!' Truly, justice will be *seen* done.

A Final Thought to Consider.

We should always bear in mind, whenever we read John's description of the awesomeness of the Judgment scene or the glories of Heaven, that these portrayals occur in the 'Revelation', the book that contains more symbolic and figurative language than any other book in the Bible.

Even although he is writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, when he describes his visions, he has to struggle with the limitation of human language. He must attempt to represent the eternal and the heavenly in human language, as best he can. Consequently, he is led to use words that are the most beautiful, most glorious, most awe-inspiring and most striking, available to him.

Do we really think that heaven is a 'place' - a literal four-square 'city', which is 1,500 miles long and 1,500 miles wide, built upon 'foundations' that are decorated with precious stones, and having streets made of gold, and surrounded by a 'great and high wall' that is made of Jasper on all sides, in each of which are set 12 gates of pearls, etc.? Surely we can understand that when John attempts to 'describe the indescribable' he is compelled to use such vivid expressions. But, in reality, the beauties of Heaven and the glories of our life in eternity will be far more wonderful and joyous than human language can depict.

So, also, with the world's final Day of reckoning held in the presence of the Great Judge. John's description of the Judgment scene is intended to make mankind realize that God's righteousness *will* be demonstrated and His justice *will* inevitably and eternally deal with sin. We need not think that there will be a physical throne, or written records, as we know them. The description of the scene must be understood as symbolic and figurative.

Accounting for Service.

Although, as faithful Christians our eternal salvation is assured, when Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, he revealed that we must finally give an account of our stewardship. Read 1st Corinthians ch.3, and see that v.13 tells us that our work will be revealed, or tested ('*manifested*' in KJV). But this 'judgment' has to do with 'rewards', not with salvation, as verse 15 tells us.

“Was Paul judging himself?”

So our question asks. But, no! Paul was not 'pre-judging' himself. The quotation in the question comes from 2nd Tim.4:7, but his own judgment of himself is revealed earlier, in 1st Tim.1:15. In his second letter he is expressing the confidence in his salvation, which every Christian is able to express. Do not fail to read the last three verses in 1st Cor. chapter 3. It may appear to be a solemn and sobering chapter, but it ends on a glorious note of assurance!

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WONDERFUL WOMAN

Women of the Bible 9

Ann Boland, Germany

MICHAL

The next woman we will look at is probably very familiar to us, as the story of David is one of the most inspiring in the Bible. This woman was the sister of David's closest friend, Jonathan, of course Saul's son. We hear of her first in **I Samuel 14:49**, and are told that she was the younger sister. The next mention of her is some chapters later, after David had slain Goliath, and become very close to Jonathan **I Samuel 18:1**. We know that Saul was possessed by a demon, which caused him to hate David, but was not able to kill him, despite trying – **I Samuel 18:10 and 11**. He offered David his elder daughter, Merab **v.17**, but David refused on the grounds that he was not worthy enough to marry a king's daughter. When Saul discovered that Michal loved David, **v 20**, he was *pleased*, probably because he thought he would have David close to him and under control. Whatever his reason, he again offered David the hand of one of his daughters, and again David refused with the reason of poverty. Eventually, David and Michal did marry, but this brought more anguish to Saul, as he realized his daughter truly loved David **v. 28 and 29**. It is a fairly well-known fact about how protective fathers are of their daughters, and many jokes have been made about the times when daughters come to marry, and the fathers have been in tears. I doubt if any father had a son-in-law like David!

In Chapter 19, Saul is again possessed by an evil spirit, and David had to flee for his life, aided by Michal **v. 11 17**. She distracted the search by hiding an idol in the bed and saying that David was ill. The reward for her resisting her father is seen in **I Samuel 25:44** – she was given to Paltiel as a wife. This is perhaps a difficult concept for Western women to accept – that of no rights for women. Unfortunately, it has been the weaker who suffer in conflicts, whether war or what we see between Saul and David. We are not given an idea of how long David and Michal were parted, but we know that it was a long time **II Samuel 3:1**. In **v 2**, we are told of David's sons from various wives (we will look at Abigail in the next article). It must have been very difficult for Michal to know that David had other wives, and that she had been made a "pawn" in the struggle between her father and her husband. We do know that David did not forget her, and when he was in a position of power, he used this to get her back **II Samuel 3: 13 and 14**. We can assume that Michal did not have such a bad life with her husband, Paltiel, as we read that he went with her, weeping all the way to David **v 16**. Thus Michal was restored to her husband. Unfortunately, there was not a "happy" ending to the story. When David recovered the ark of God, he brought it to the City of David, and danced in front of it for the Lord. We are told in two accounts that Michal saw this, and despised David in her heart **II Samuel 6: 16 and I Chronicles 15: 29**. This was such a shameful act, that Michal's punishment was to bear no more children **II Samuel 6 :23**. In those days it was a terrible thing not to have children, especially as a king's wife would be competing for her children to inherit from the father.

This seems like a fairly “tame” story, but we can get a lot out of it.

- Firstly, the love and commitment David felt for Michal, as he had her returned to him when he finally won the struggle. We might think that some battles are lost, but keeping our faith will have its rewards.
- Secondly, we should not despise people, especially not when they are doing their best to serve God. Perhaps someone doesn’t sing as well as you think songs should be sung, or they don’t pray in a way you think fitting, or their preaching style is not very good. Each does his or her best (or should do) in the Lord’s service.
- Thirdly, if we are given something that belonged to another, we should look after it as well as we can – Paltiel was given Michal, and it was not his fault that she was returned to David, but what we read of him shows us he must have had genuine feelings for her. We should be thankful for what we have – very difficult in modern, commercial times. God knows what we need, and he provides for us.

I SAW JESUS

I saw Jesus last week. He was wearing blue jeans and an old shirt. He was up at the building we call our church; He was alone and working hard. For just a minute he looked a little like one of the people who regularly attend our church. But it was Jesus, I could tell by his smile.

I saw Jesus last Sunday. He was teaching a Bible class. He didn’t talk real loud or use long words, but you could tell he believed what he said. For just a minute, he looked like my Sunday School teacher. But it was Jesus, I could tell by his loving voice.

I saw Jesus yesterday. He was at the hospital visiting a friend who was sick. They prayed together quietly. For just a minute he looked like the guy I saw at the worship gathering last week. But it was Jesus, I could tell by the tears in his eyes.

I saw Jesus this morning. He was in my kitchen making my breakfast and fixing me a special lunch. For just a minute he looked like my wife. But it was Jesus, I could feel the love from his heart.

I saw Jesus this afternoon. He was cutting the grass in the community where I live. He was smiling and waving at everyone who was driving down our street. It made me feel special, even if it was only for a moment. For a minute, I thought it was just another person we paid to keep our community clean. But it was Jesus. No one else has that much joy.

I saw Jesus tonight. He was sitting out in the street looking for someone to help him. For a minute he looked like just another homeless person. But it was Jesus. I could tell by the look of sincere suffering in his eyes.

I see Jesus everywhere, Taking food to the sick, welcoming others to his home, being friendly to a someone who needs love and for just a minute I think he’s someone I know. But it’s always Jesus, I can tell by the way He serves.

May someone see Jesus in you today.

Author unknown

Understanding the Life of Jesus Jesus the Light of the World

(John Griffiths, Wembley)

Light has been something that has fascinated scientists. In the 17th century Isaac Newton carried out experiments to study the nature and property of light. By shining a beam of light through a glass prism he showed that light is made up of the seven colours of the rainbow. Light is essential for life to exist on this earth. Green plants need light for the process of photosynthesis to take place, which produces the basic food of sugar necessary for animal life. Without light we could not exist. Whilst physical light is necessary for the existence of physical life, so there is another light, a spiritual light, that is essential for our spiritual life and well being. In this article shall look at some of the claims Jesus made to be the light of the world, and what this means for us today.

CHRIST AND LIGHT

Several Old Testament prophecies speak of a time of hope when One would come bringing light into a world of darkness: (**Isaiah 9:2**), **"The people walking in darkness have seen a great light: on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned."** Matthew quotes this passage in **Matthew 4:16** and applies it to the coming of Jesus Christ. Other prophecies on this same theme can be found in **Isaiah 49:6** and **Isaiah 60:1**.

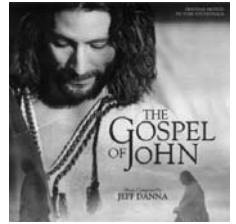
The picture of Christ coming into the world as a light shining in the darkness, foreseen in Old Testament prophecies, is expressed clearly in **John 1:4-5,9**, **"In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it... The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world."** This description of Jesus as the light who comes into this world is common in the Gospel of John. John records several occasions when Jesus described Himself as Light. We shall consider two of these occasions.

The first is in **John 8:12**, **"Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.'"** Jesus spoke these words when the Jews were celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles, a Feast in which light played an important symbolic role. At this Feast the people gave thanks to God for the deliverance of their forefathers from their captivity in Egypt and for the guidance that God provided during the years in the wilderness. On the first night of this feast a ceremony was held in the temple known as the *Illumination of the Temple*. Four giant lampstands were lit in the Court of the Women as darkness fell over the city. These lampstands filled the temple with light and symbolised the pillar of fire that guided the Israelites by night during their wilderness wanderings. With the memory of this ceremony fresh in their minds, Jesus proclaimed to the people, **"I am the light of the world."** In making this astounding claim he identifies himself with the God whose very nature is light (**1 John 1:5**).

One of the qualities of light is that it dispels the darkness. When we walk into a dark room we can dispel the darkness simply by turning on the light. Darkness cannot exist in the presence of light. As Jesus is the light of the world he says, **"he who follows me will not walk in darkness."** If we are following the light then we shall not be walking in darkness. As the light of the world, Jesus is the embodiment of the truth that brings us enlightenment. However, there is a condition. If we want to have this enlightenment then we must become Jesus' followers or disciples. If we are not following him, then we cannot benefit from him being the light of the world. If we follow Jesus, we shall not be walking in darkness; instead Jesus says we shall **"have the light of life."** Jesus is the light that brings us life. When we follow Jesus the Light of the World we are walking in his light and we have the life that he gives. The significance of Jesus' claim was clearly understood by the Jews who heard it. John goes on to

tell us that the Pharisees challenged the validity of Jesus' testimony (**John 8:13**), a challenge that led to a further discussion in which Jesus asserted his true identity and purpose.

The second occasion when Jesus spoke of himself as the light of the world is recorded in **John 9:5**, "**As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.**" Jesus spoke these words just before he gave sight to a man who had been blind from birth. The disciples wanted to know whether the man's blindness was caused by sin, either his own or that of his parents. Jesus said that sin was not the issue, rather the man's blindness provided the opportunity for Jesus to display the work of God in this man's life. Time would come when the opportunity for him to do such work would no longer be there. The healing of this blind man was a sign pointing to the truth of Jesus being the light of the world. Since birth, this man had been living in darkness, now Jesus brought light into his life through this miracle. The miracle was an object lesson, teaching the truth that Jesus can bring light or enlightenment to those living in the spiritual blindness and darkness of sin and ignorance. This blind man later went on to confess his belief that Jesus was the Son of Man (**John 9:35-37**). He had come to understand the truth concerning the identity of Jesus. Physical sight was followed by spiritual enlightenment.



However, Jesus knew there were those, like the Pharisees, who had physical sight but were blind spiritually to his identity and would not come to him in faith. John speaks of such people in **John 3:19-21**, "**And this is the judgement, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does what is true comes to the light, that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been wrought in God.**" Light will expose evil deeds and so those who want to continue in their evil ways will shun the light. Our natural tendency is to run away from the light because our deeds are evil and we do not want them to be exposed. But if we are seeking to do what is right, to live true lives, then we need have no fear of coming to the light. There are practical implications for us when we come to Jesus the light. In the lives that we live we show whether we are walking in the light of Jesus or whether we are still walking in darkness.

THE CHRISTIAN AND LIGHT

As the light of the world Jesus brought truth into a world of ignorance, he brought hope into a world of despair and he brought life into a world of death. In accepting Jesus as the light we come out of the darkness of our sin and ignorance into the light of his truth. It is as we walk in His light that we have fellowship with God and with one another, and the blood of Jesus cleanses us of our sins. (**1 John 1:6-7**)

Christians are pictured as people who have come out of darkness into light. In **1 Peter 2:9** Peter says, "**but you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who brought you out of darkness into His marvellous light.**" This transfer from darkness to light comes when we obey the gospel. The conscious decision that we make for ourselves to faithfully obey Christ and follow him will lead us from darkness into light. In being delivered from darkness and brought into the light we are set free from ignorance, error, unbelief and sin.

Having come into the light we are encouraged to continue in the light and live as children of light. In **Matthew 5:14-16** Jesus said, "**You are the light of the world... Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.**" Christians must shine as lights in a world of darkness, being a reflection of Christ the true light of the world. Just as the moon reflects a small proportion of the light of the sun, so we are to reflect the light of Christ through the lives that we live.

News and Information

Ghana Appeal

Donations to the Appeal continue to save the lives of brethren and their children, as well as assisting evangelism and we thank our donors for this. It is very much appreciated.

Brethren experiencing extreme hardship are being helped, particularly where illness is involved and this is more prevalent in tropical countries than in more temperate climates. Malaria and snakebites are two examples.

Individual brethren are ready to discuss the gospel with people they meet and they generally receive a favourable response. Donations have helped some to travel to teach in other places and in this way new churches have been established, which brings a need for Bibles and gospel literature.

A husband and wife who have given faithful service to the Lord over very many years have lost their income when their shop went on fire. They are now destitute and are relying entirely on help from brethren.

Much has been achieved through donations and we pray that this will continue. 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**

Obituary

Michael Thistlethwaite was born in Ulverston on 27th July 1936. He spent his boyhood in the town of Ulverston and attended Sunday School and services at the Church of Christ

there. He was baptized in July 1947 and was welcomed into the Church on Lord's Day, 6th July.

Michael moved to Preston, Lancashire as a young man and there met and married a young lady, Brenda Holmes. He was to spend his working life in and around Preston.

On his approach to retirement, Michael became a Local Councillor and was very proud to become Mayor in 1997/1998. He was also involved in a number of charities, and this kind of work was dear to his heart. At various times his voluntary work led him to be a hospital driver, a repairer of hearing aids and he represented his community in the neighbourhood watch scheme.

From 1994 Michael and his wife, Brenda, attended the Church at Blackburn for a number of years and when that closed in 1998 he met with Elizabeth Cavill and Peggy Wilson in Peggy's home in Darwin and with help from other brothers kept the Lord's work alive by remembering his Saviour and breaking bread every Sunday morning. He kept on with this work after Brenda died up to the time that he became too ill to continue.

Michael's work on the Council made him a well-known figure and the local newspaper, The Lancashire Evening Post, carried a tribute to Michael that was headed, 'Tribute to a friend and gentleman'. A letter of condolence from South Ribble Borough council also carried the quote. Michael was indeed one of life's true gentlemen. He worked tirelessly for the less advantaged and was a rock of support for people who were at feeling low. He was a passionate advocate of the Labour movement and of justice and peace and he found great solace in his faith.

Michael's funeral service was held at Preston Crematorium and Andrew Marsden conducted the service.

"Not a brief glance, I beg, a passing word;
But as thou dwell'st with thy disciples Lord;
Familiar, condescending, patient, free,
Come not to sojourn, but abide with me."

H F Lyte

Bill Thistlethwaite, Ulverston

Coming Events

European Christian Workshop

**Lancaster University:
31st August to 2nd September 2006**

Speakers are:

Alastair Ferrie (Dundee)
Mark Hill (Loughborough, UK)
John Griffiths (Wembley, UK)
Trevor Williams (Bristol, UK)
Tony Coffey (Dublin, Ireland)
Earl Lavender (Lipscomb Univ., USA)
Mike Williams (Lipscomb Univ., USA)
Evertt Huffard (Harding Graduate
School of Religion, USA)

For more information visit our website:
www.christianworkshop.net

Alternatively you can email for information to:
paulhalliday@yahoo.com
stephen.woodcock@tesco.net

We are in the process of finalising costs but will provide that information as soon as possible.

**Paul Halliday (Newport)
Stephen Woodcock (Wigan)**

Tranent, Scotland

Annual Social held on
18th March 2006 in
St. Martin's Hall, Tranent.
at 4.00 p.m.

Speakers:

Niall Scobie, Dennyloanhead
Graeme Pearson, Dunfermline.

Stretford, Manchester

Saturday evening Gospel meetings.
Each to start at 7.00 p.m.

April 22nd

Speaker: Mark Hill, Loughborough.
Subject to be announced.

September 23rd.

Speaker: Ernest Makin, Longshoot.
"Who is Jesus?"

October 21st

Speaker and subject to be announced.

Kirkcaldy, Scotland

Annual Social

Saturday, April 15th at **1.30 p.m.**
Speaker: John Mooney, Livingston.

PLEASE NOTE CORRECTION OF TIME

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