

The SCRIPTURE STANDARD

Vol. 71 No. 9

SEPTEMBER, 2004

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

BE INSPIRED...

More by co-incidence than design this month's edition has a lot to say about matters that, on the face of it, have nothing at all to do with inspiration and upliftment. We may well ask how we can be inspired by articles on tribulation, coping with despair and stress and the like.

Indeed many critics of Christianity or any other religion that places emphasis on a 'higher power' of any description would no doubt dismiss such reflections as merely another example of weak people in need of some kind of emotional or psychological crutch satisfying that need by referring their problems to some kind of mythical problem-solver.

However even a cursory glance through the Bible would demonstrate that the glory of our belief in God and His Christ is not vested in some quaint belief in the notion that all we have to do is "cast our cares" and then sit back and let the good times roll. If that is the message then I think we do something of a dis-service to those who listen to us. The hymn-writer was probably nearer the mark with the words, "not for ease our prayer shall be, but for strength that we may ever live our lives courageously."

I recently revisited the circumstances of the death of Stephen. He was "a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit." In that era when the apostles were granted extraordinary powers, Stephen "full of grace and power, did great wonders and signs amongst the people." Some disputed with him but they "could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke." He spoke passionately about Jesus and, when arrested for speaking the truth produced a dynamic defense of his faith and a withering dissection of the Jews' actions and position. He called them "stiff-necked, uncircumcised in heart and ears, resisting the Holy Spirit."

Did his faith bring him ease? No his opponents were enraged. He looked into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus sitting at the right hand of God. Did this vision bring him deliverance from danger? No, his opponents dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Did Stephen call on God to deliver him from his plight or indeed accuse God of faithlessness because of it? Not a bit of it. He prayed to his God with two pleas. **"Lord Jesus, receive my Spirit."** And then in echoes of the Saviour himself, this remarkable statement, **"Lord, do not hold this sin against them."**

I'm tired of people who belittle God to justify their own unbelief. The glory of Stephen's faith was not, and the glory of Christianity is not, that we should count it as a panacea for all of life's ills. Rather Stephen's overwhelming trust in the God that he served, the saving grace of His Christ and the eternal promises that he owned are a remarkable example Christian faith. **And that is inspiring.**

Contents: 1-Be Inspired; 2-Word Study; 4-The Road to Recovery; 7-Wonderful Woman; 8-Question Box; 11-Foundations of Faith; 13-What do you think?; 15-News & Info.

Word Study

TRIBULATION AND DISTRESS

(Ian S. Davidson, Motherwell)

Tribulation is from the Latin *tribulum*, a threshing instrument. A *tribulum*, for example, separated the grain from the chaff. Suffering and trials also do that. The Greek word for tribulation is *thlipsis* and simply means pressure i.e. pressure from without. The early Christians knew what it was like to live under pressure. They were assailed by many forces, but overcame them all. They were a remarkable people and a wonderful example to all.

Thlipsis is found over forty times in the New Testament Scriptures and is translated as tribulation, affliction, persecution, anguish and trouble. Jesus warned His disciples of coming tribulation. They would suffer just as He suffered at the hands of His enemies. Tribulation would separate the wheat from the chaff and the strong from the weak. Jesus said: **"In this world you shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."** (John 16:33b). Paul wrote: **"And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation works patience..."** (Romans 5:3); **"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?"** **"For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory..."** (2 Corinthians 4: 17). (It is interesting to note that the term *thlipsis* is found more often in Paul's second epistle to the Corinthians than in any of his other letters. 2 Corinthians is a great letter sadly neglected by many writers, who have tended to concentrate on his first epistle. I think I have been guilty of this too!)

THE APOSTLE JOHN

The apostle John spoke of tribulation in the Revelation letter. It affected him personally. He wrote: **"I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ."** (1:9). John had been banished to this island by the Roman authorities because they regarded him as a dangerous man. He was the last surviving apostle on the earth. Christianity, by then, was making its mark on the Empire and the reaction was persecution. In fact, there turned out to be ten major persecutions of the Christians by the pagan Romans. These persecutions ended in 311 A.D. Thereafter, Constantine issued the Edict of Milan (313 A.D.) in which the Christian religion was the subject of toleration. John foresaw the triumph of the persecuted. We read: **"And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, Who are these who are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, you know. And he said to me, These are they who came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."** (Revelation 7:13,14).

DISTRESS

There is distress as well as tribulation. Distress is from *stenochoria*. One writer has commented: "It signifies a strait or narrow confine. It is from *stenos*, strait, and *choros*, a place. It was sometimes used for a mountain passage so restricted that one had to literally worm his way between the rocks. Both tribulation and distress indicate pressure, but the first has to do with pressure from without, the second, pressure from within. The import of the

original for distress is to be hemmed in on every side. We use the expression, 'Everywhere I turned I ran into a wall!' This is the mental state of distress." Paul uses the word four times in all. It is found in Romans 2:9; 8:35; and 2 Corinthians 6:4; 12:10. Inward pressures can be as bad, if not worse, than outward pressures. Many psychiatrists would confirm this statement. Truly, most of man's problems are not found in outer space, but in the inner space, where no probes can go.

THE APOSTLE PAUL

Paul wrote of suffering for Jesus' sake. In mentioning his famous "thorn in the flesh", he went on to say: **"Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then I am strong."** (2 Corinthians 12:10). He was a remarkable man to take pleasure in all these things. He knew that suffering was for a while, but joy was for eternity. He lived in the hope of far better things to come. He wrote to the Romans: **"For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."** (8:18). No matter the outward pressures; no matter the inward pressures, Paul was going to see things through. It would not all be plain sailing, but the safe heavenly haven would undoubtedly be reached. Jesus would see to that. After all, He Himself is captaining the ship and can be completely trusted. He knows the way because He is the way!

OUR WORLD TODAY

Tribulation and distress cannot always be avoided, but they can be overcome in the strength of the Spirit. We Christians in the West might think we have things bad here, but we should spare more than a thought for many of our brothers and sisters in the Third World. There, many experience all sorts of pressures: political, economical, social, religious, etc. I know it's bad because they write and tell me. A number will read this paper. I urge them to keep strong and keep the faith no matter the cost. They are an example to us all. They must be mystified when they read of the goings on here in the rich man's world: violence, vandalism, vice, gloom, grief and godlessness. Secularism, humanism and atheism are now reaping their rewards. The world has gone full circle. In the United Kingdom, I now live in a pagan society. The rest of the West, I believe, is also pagan. Christianity, of course, began in such a world and triumphed. Now it has to do it all over again. The early Christians overcame everything, including tribulation and distress, to obtain victory. They feared nothing, not even death itself. So we today have to take up arms and fight a similar battle. And remember, as Paul said, **"We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."** (Ephesians 6:12). The warfare is spiritual. It is not just a matter of life or death, but of eternal life or eternal death.



FINAL THOUGHTS

Fellow saints, we are all in this together, no matter where we live. Let us then help one another; encourage one another and cheer one another as we see the great day approaching. Let us all live up to our responsibilities. Let us tell others of the good news of Jesus. We have been saved to serve, and the cry of each should be: **"Lord, not my will, but thine be done!"** Jesus overcame tribulation and distress; Paul overcame tribulation and distress; and many of the early saints did too. Let us then be uplifted by their faith and example. So many of them resisted unto blood. God saw them as true and faithful martyrs. Brothers and sisters, where do we stand today in comparison with them?

Practical Christianity

THE ROAD TO RECOVERY

(David Yasko, USA)

STEP 3 CONSCIOUSLY CHOOSE TO COMMIT ALL MY LIFE AND WILL TO CHRIST'S CARE AND CONTROL.

Matthew 11:28-30 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me. ... For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Jesus offers us an invitation from God. He says, 'Come to me and I will lighten your load and make your life easier. You will have relief, you will have release, you will have rest, you will have rejuvenation. Give me control of your life and watch what I do with you.' What a deal! Yet for some of us this isn't a new offer. We've heard it before and haven't acted on it. It's like having a gift that you don't open. What keeps us from taking this important step? Why do we delay giving our life to God and surrendering control to Christ? Well, I'm glad you asked. There are five things:

PRIDE; I don't want to admit I need help.

Proverbs 18:12 "Before his downfall a man's heart is proud." The Good News Version says, "Arrogant people are on the way to ruin." Why? Simple - they won't admit it when they need help. *Proverbs 10:8 "The self sufficient fool falls flat on his face."* Are you getting this message? Now maybe you're not ready to take this first step. That's OK. Maybe you just need a little more pain and God will gladly allow it to get your attention.

GUILT; I'm ashamed to ask God for help.

Psalms 40:12 "Problems far too big for me to solve are piled higher than my head. Meanwhile my sins, too many to count, have all caught up with me, and I am ashamed to look up." (LB) Have you ever made a deal with God to get you out of a jam and then you didn't keep your end of the deal? It makes you ashamed doesn't it? When we look at just how often we've blown it, it embarrasses us to the point where we don't want to ask for help. That's our thinking not God's thinking; His way is that we learn from our mistakes.

FEAR: I'm afraid of what I'd have to give up.

Did you hear the one about the man who fell off a cliff. He cries out "God help me!" Halfway down he reaches out and miraculously grabs onto a branch. He cries out again "God help me!" And he hears a voice, "THIS IS THE LORD, TRUST ME. LET GO AND I'LL CATCH YOU." The man looks up and it's 500 feet to the top. He looks down and it's 500 feet to the bottom. And he says, "Is anybody else up there?" That is so typical. God is the last resort and we're afraid to let go. There are hanging by that last branch and they're looking around and going, "I'm ok. I'm hanging on ..."

And the root is pulling out from the cliff and we still say, "No, I'm fine." What are we

afraid will happen if we give our lives to the total care and control of God? We don't like being controlled? We are being controlled all the time! It's just that we get to choose who we're being controlled by when we let God be the boss. You want freedom? Well freedom is choosing who controls us. Jesus says let me have control because I'm the truth and the truth will set you free. So do you know yet what you're holding on to that's keeping you from turning it all over to God? Look at *Mark 8:36*, **"What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?"** This world is temporary and our soul is eternal. God takes what we give him and adds new meaning to it and then gives it back to us in a whole new way. Maybe we've been afraid to give it up to God because of what we might become....don't worry. When we start worrying about the specifics, we lose sight of the whole goal - which is recovery. It's my experience that for everything we know we need to give up, there are two or three things in our life we don't know we need to give up. We need to give God a blank cheque and say, "Here I am."

WORRY: I confuse the decision phase with the problem solving phase.

In 1963, JFK said, "By the end of the decade, we will have a man on the moon." That was a decision. Had all the problems been worked out before he made that decision? No. He left it to the CIA to sort that out.

A good manager knows you never confuse the decision phase with the problem solving phase otherwise you never make a decision. Kennedy said, "We're going to the moon." The decision was made; how to achieve this feat came later. Here it is in a nutshell: "The Christian life is a decision followed by a process." Recovery is a decision followed by a process. It starts by saying, "Let's go for it."

In World War II, the US used the same approach to capture islands in the Pacific that had been captured by the Japanese. The Marines would come in and establish a beachhead; small maybe but they wanted to establish a presence. Had they liberated the island? No. They'd just got a foothold but they could make their start then. Once they made the beachhead it was only a matter of time before the island would be liberated. When we make this step of faith, God is establishing a beachhead in our hearts and lives. Do all of our problems go away? No they don't but God has established a presence in us with the purpose of setting us free. Notice *1 Peter 5:7*, **"Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you."** When God holds us in his hands, we are safe. Loving fathers hold their children's hands, they don't let go when their kid's want to let go. Even when we want to let go of God, he'll hang on to us.

UNBELIEF; I want to believe, but my faith seems so small.

Jairus came to Jesus one day and said to him, 'Look, people say you can heal people. I've got a daughter who is precious to me and she's sick. Can you heal her?' Jesus said, 'If you have faith, she can be healed.' Jairus said, 'You're going to have to help me out. I want to believe, but I don't know how. So help me with my unbelief.' Jesus said, 'Good enough.' And he healed the girl. Maybe it's time for us to ask Jesus to help us through the times we have trouble believing. You say, 'Don't you have to have super faith in order to claim God's blessings?' Look at *Matthew 17:20*, **"If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, ... Nothing will be impossible for you."** It's not the size of our faith that counts, it's the size of our God. We can have a huge

faith and put it in the wrong thing and get no results at all. A little faith in a big God gets big results. If you feel you've tried this step before with no success, chances are you were involved but not committed, like the kamikaze pilot who went on 33 missions!

HOW DO WE TAKE THIS STEP?

1. ACCEPT GOD'S SON AS YOUR SAVIOUR.

That's the decision. It's saying "help." It's submitting as much of myself as I understand, at this moment, to as much of Christ as I understand, at this moment.

2. ACCEPT GOD'S WORD AS YOUR STANDARD.

It's saying that from now on I will accept God's manual to live my life by. The Bible is our instruction manual telling us what to do and how to go.

3. ACCEPT GOD'S WILL AS YOUR STRATEGY.

That's saying "God what do you want me to do?" You woke up this morning and that means he has a plan for you today. *Psalm 40:8, "I desire to do your will, O my God."* We're saying we are willing to do anything, anywhere, anytime. We don't even have to understand it. We just need to be comfortable with the fact that God put us here for a reason, whether we understand that reason or not. When we do that we make God's will our strategy for our life.

4. ACCEPT GOD'S POWER AS YOUR STRENGTH.

Philippians 4:13, "I can do everything through Him who gives me strength." We don't have to rely on our own strength and energy anymore. We get to rely on God's power and God's strength. We don't have to fight fatigue. We can hand it over to God. All of it! *Revelation 3:20, "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me."*

Seeing or Believing?

Jesus is a gentle man. He's not going to kick your door in. He'll knock but it's up to us to open it. Step three is opening and walking through that door. Willpower is just willingness to accept God's power to change our life.

Pilots use one of two systems to fly. IFR which stands for Instrument Flight Rating, and VFR which is Visual Flight Rating. IFR is where you rely on your instruments to determine speed and altitude, where you are and which way you're going. VFR is relying on sight. VFR is reliable. You pick out landmarks and go from there; but VFR only works if you can see outside. If the weather and cloud conditions are bad, you'll have to pick up the microphone and say to the tower, "I'm switching over to IFR." When you do that, you submit yourself to someone else's control. Sometimes planes crash because the pilot wouldn't admit he or she was lost. They wouldn't pick up the microphone and say, "I need help." They wanted to control it on their own even if it means flying into the ground. Here's my point. We've done OK for ourselves this far in life flying VFR. But life is life and that means we are going to have bad weather. And depending on what we do is going to determine if we land safely or fly into the rock face. Are you willing to hand it all over to God yet? Consider if you want to crash or fly...

WONDERFUL WOMANHOOD

The Power of Love?

A few weeks ago I saw a documentary on television about a married couple in America. The husband loved fat women, and so encouraged his wife to put on weight until she was an unbelievable **821 pounds** (that is 373kg or 58 stone). Although she is now half that weight, she now has to have a box of medicines next to her. She suffers from diabetes, high blood pressure, has to have an oxygen mask at times, and also has bad back ache. Needless to say, she finds it very difficult to move around, and spends her day lying on her bed, using the computer. They attempted to move her to the living room, where she could have a change of scene, but the specially enlarged wheelchair couldn't fit through the doorway, and she couldn't walk the three steps to the chair, she was in such pain. Is this what love is about - can we expect people who love us to go to such lengths to show us how much they care about us?

My thoughts turned to one of the most beautiful passages in the Bible - *1 Corinthians 13*. This passage lists all the wonderful attributes of love. It is patient and kind (v4), it doesn't act unbecomingly and does not seek its own or insist on its own way (v5), it bears all things (v7), and, most important of all **it never fails** (v8). I think this answers the above question - we cannot expect those who love us to do that which we think is good for *us*. I'm sure we can all think of past occasions when we have thought "If he/she loves me, they would do x, y and z, never mind a, b and c". However, it doesn't work that way, at least not all the time. We are all individuals, and, fortunately or not, we cannot read each others minds. We cannot tell what will please someone, we can only hope that our knowledge and experience of the person will show us what they expect or like. What we must keep in mind is that love is completely selfless, love does not look for gain for itself, it is totally for others.

Now, you can argue that Jesus let himself suffer for us, like the wife suffered for her husband in the above example. But, and it is a big BUT, he didn't gain anything for himself, as the husband did - that his wish for a fat wife was fulfilled. Jesus himself had nothing to gain from his own death. He came from God's side to be mortal. Can you imagine what a wrench that was? We can see His torment in *Matthew 26 vv36 to 42* - Let this cup pass from Me (v39). His love for us is shared by God (*John 3 v 16*) and so we must be imitators of God (*Ephesians 5 v 1*). It is not always easy, especially in this materialistic and self-centred world that has been created around us. Single-parent families are persuaded that love can be replaced by High Street names in clothes, e.g. Nike and Reebok (I read an article about it a few years ago). We are told that if we loved our children we would buy them the latest computer, video game, mobile 'phone, and so on. Isn't it much better to give our loved ones a great big hug and to say "I love you"? (Much cheaper too, although the result will be amazing).

So, when you feel down, or tired, think of those who love you. *1 Corinthians 13 v13* But now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love. **IT NEVER FAILS.**



Writing for the 'Question Box' is an interesting experience because the questions arrive from a variety of sources. Very often they come from brothers or sisters who are known to me personally and from congregations that I know well.

Others arrive from overseas, and the people who write generally explain their reason for writing so that I have some idea of the problem/s with which they have to deal. In such cases, to use a popular, if ungrammatical

expression, '*I know where they are coming from*'. I can see with reasonable clarity how best to reply.

I might also add that very occasionally, a question will arrive without any indication of the identity of the sender or the place of origin, and, of course, this makes it more difficult to decide how to respond.

A Cry from the Heart!

This month, however, an issue has been raised which is somewhat different from the subjects we are usual asked to consider. I invite you to consider several questions that have been supplied by someone who, I suspect, is young in the faith – and perhaps also young in years. Judge for yourself. Here are the 'questions' just as I have received them.

- 1) ***"It happens that sometimes babes in Christ (new Christians) feel neglected in the Church assembly".***
- 2) ***"Why do preachers sometimes preach bad sermons?"***
- 3) ***"The 'B.T.' advert says 'It's good to talk'. Yet Christians are sometimes lacking in this among themselves."***



As you no doubt will have recognized, what we have here are two obvious **statements**, numbered 1 and 3, and one rather pointed **question**, which might actually be regarded as a third statement. And I think you will understand why I have the feeling that they have come from someone young in the faith, and perhaps fairly young in years.

These statements leave me with the impression that the sender is not altogether happy or comfortable in the congregation of which he has become a member. Be that as it may, one thing is certain; he has drawn our attention to a problem, which, though sadly not new, is all too common in our congregations.

Aftercare for Babes in Christ.

Let me ask a question that should help us to focus on the problem to which I refer. **How many congregations do you know, that have set in place a programme specially designed to meet the needs of 'babes in Christ'?**

Is it not a fact that, after the initial joy of the 'birth', new Christians are all-too-often left to fend for themselves? We are all naturally delighted when a soul comes to the

Lord and is 'born of the Spirit' and brought into the Family. But the sad fact is that, all too soon, the newly-born Christian is treated in a way that would create widespread public outrage if it were to be meted out to a newly born baby, and would probably cause 'Social Services' officialdom to take action.

The Lord once said – albeit in a different context – that the children of this world are wiser in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light. (Luk.16;8), and it is absolutely indisputable that worldly organizations and societies take more care to keep their new members, and are better prepared to do so, than are most of our congregations.

The trouble is that we seem to expect babes in Christ to grow up far too quickly. I well remember that our late dear brother Leonard Morgan used to say that one of the mistakes we make is that we 'expect babes in Christ to eat off our plate!'

He meant that do not take sufficient care to ensure that new Christians – like newly born babies – receive the diet appropriate to their needs. At that state in their lives, they do not need 'strong meat', and I wonder how many have 'choked to death' on the sort of spiritual food that has been served up in their congregations?

'Bad Sermons'?

Do you think that something like this lies behind my young correspondent's rather blunt 2nd question? "Why do preachers sometimes preach bad sermons?"

I must confess that I am tempted to misappropriate a phrase from Mrs Browning's poem, and say, 'Let me count the ways!' But, let me ask; how would you answer this cry from the heart? Why do preachers 'sometimes preach bad sermons'? 'Bad', of course, must surely mean in the sense of 'boring', 'uninteresting', 'unhelpful', 'over-critical', 'over-long' – and probably 'over-the-head'!

These are 'effects', but what are the 'causes'? There may be many reasons. Could it be that: -

- The Preacher is not adequately prepared?
- Has not spent enough time in preparation?
- The Sermon is insufficiently thought out?
- Perhaps he made a wrong choice of subject?
- Or maybe he is just having a 'bad-hair day'?
- It might even be that he is not feeling physically very well.

Reasons? After preaching for about 65 years I admit that I am an expert in them. I think I know them all! I learned a long time ago that my sermons do not always ring everyone's bell!

However, I am glad to see the word 'sometimes' in the question! It isn't all bad, but a preacher certainly needs to give real thought to the make-up of the congregation, in order to be able to address its needs. Preaching should never be merely a matter of filling a twenty-minute spot in the service, or an opportunity for regaling the congregation with the latest bit of knowledge that one has acquired.

Feed the family! Strong meat for the mature, and the unadulterated milk of the Word for the young in faith. Let there be a varied diet, based on the recognition of the

varied needs of the congregation. Remember the young. But do not forget the old!

And always remember that no preacher has an automatic right to be heard! That has to be earned by the adequate preparation of a sermon worth hearing.

In an Irreligious Society

But, I am tempted to digress!

Let me return to my topic! In these days, when we can hardly speak of 'Christian Britain', since we see so much godlessness, irreligion and even paganism in our society, we have to work very hard indeed to bring people to Christ. The Gospel Missions and Evangelistic Campaigns that used to be so effective, are usually poorly attended by visitors, and - to be blunt about this - often badly supported by our own members. In fact, many congregations now no longer hold the Lord's Day evening meeting, which, in 'the old days', was always a time for the preaching of the Gospel. I am well aware that there may be various reasons for this situation, and they cannot be adequately discussed in 'The Question Box', but the fact remains that we are certainly not winning souls in the numbers we have seen in the past.

Losing the Saved!

This being the case, why are we so inefficient in caring for the souls we do manage to win? We struggle to bring them to the Lord, and we lead them into the Church by the only 'entrance' that has His approval, and, in very little time, we discover that they have slipped out of the back door and we have lost them again.

I think I hear something of this in the 'questions' that I have already reported. My correspondent wrote 'babes in Christ (new Christians) feel neglected in the Church assembly'. I wonder if this could be said about your congregation? - or, perhaps, about the congregation of which I am a member?

Keeping the Saved Safe.

You may have read that brother Alistair Ferrie has recently published a book entitled **"Step by Step: Aftercare for new Christians"**. Alastair does not know that I am mentioning his book in this article, but I tell you that it is the sort of guide and handbook that congregations badly need, and, if I were in a position to do so, I would ensure that every congregation had at least half-a-dozen copies on hand with which to help new brothers and sisters to become established in their faith and to find their place in the Family of God.

What we have looked at this month is something about which every congregation needs to give serious thought, and I thank my young correspondent for having brought it to our attention.

P.S. If you are interested in Alastair Ferrie's book, contact the Church in Dundee. I am fairly sure that any interested congregation could work out a good deal with these brethren.

Questions to; Frank Worgan, 11, Stanier Road, Corby, Northants. NN17 1XP
Email: Frank@fworgan.freeseve.co.uk



Foundations of the Faith

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

BECOMING CHILDREN OF GOD

(John Griffiths, Wembley)

What a great privilege it is to be called a child of God! The apostle John expresses his astonishment that we should be called children of God: **"See what love the Father has given us that we should be called children of God; and so we are" (1 John 3:1)**. John sees the fact that we really are children of God as an expression of God's love for us. But how did these people become children of God in the first place? And what does it mean to occupy this privileged position? These are important questions for us to consider.

A New Birth

We understand that through the physical process of birth we enter into a family. We are born into our earthly families and by birth we are the children of our parents. Our status as children is acquired by birth, and when we are born into our families we accept the responsibilities involved in being a member of the family. All this is true of our physical family relationships. In a similar fashion it is necessary for us to undergo a birth experience if we are to become children of God.

Early on in his ministry Jesus visited Jerusalem, and on that occasion he was approached by one of the leading Pharisees named Nicodemus. Nicodemus realised that the miracles or signs Jesus' performed were evidence that Jesus was **"a teacher come from God"** and that he would be unable to do these signs if God were not with him (**John 3:1-2**). Jesus developed the conversation with Nicodemus by telling him what was required of those who would enter the kingdom of God: **"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3)**. Jesus spoke of the necessity of being **"born anew"** (or **"born from above"**) if a person is to enter the kingdom of God. This statement puzzled Nicodemus, who, thinking in purely physical terms asked, **"How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" (John 3:4)**. The idea of a man entering into the womb to be born again seemed preposterous. How could such a thing happen? And of course it is preposterous, but this was not what Jesus was talking about.

Jesus went on to explain to Nicodemus that being "born anew" meant being born of water and the Spirit: **"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot see the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born anew.' The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so it is with every one who is born of the Spirit" (John 3:5-8)**. So Jesus was not talking about a physical rebirth (being born of the flesh), but a new birth of

a spiritual nature, a birth of water and the Spirit that would bring about entry into the kingdom of God. Jesus speaks of the mysterious nature of this new birth of the Spirit when he speaks of the wind blowing where it wills. We cannot see the wind itself, just the evidence that it is there: the sound, the sight of the trees swaying, the touch on our faces. And likewise with those who are born of the Spirit, the Spirit cannot be seen, but what can be seen is the evidence of the Spirit's activities in the lives of those who are "born of the Spirit." Nicodemus still did not really understand what Jesus was talking about, and his final question to Jesus was **"How can this be?" (John 3:9)**. With the advantage of hindsight and with our knowledge of subsequent teaching we can understand that Jesus was talking about conversion, or how a person becomes a Christian. Being born anew, being born of water and the Spirit, happens to us when we accept Christ as our Lord and Saviour and submit to Him in baptism. Our baptism is our new birth day and marks the beginning of our new life in Christ and the Spirit.

The Power To Become Children of God

It is the experience of this new birth that enables us to become children of God. By being born anew we are born into God's family. We undergo a radical transformation; we are new people with a new identity and status. On the outside we still look the same, but inwardly we have been transformed. It is this new status we have as children of God that causes John's expression of amazement that the love of God should demonstrate itself in this way (**1 John 3:1**).

The opportunity to become children of God is open to all. Jesus came into this world as **"the true light that enlightens every man" (John 1:9)**. And despite the fact that he was in the world that he himself had made, the world refused to recognise and receive him (**John 1:10-11**). However, not all rejected him: **"But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God; who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12-13)**. It is a person's reception of and belief in Jesus that empowers that one to become a child of God. Again, becoming a child of God does not involve a physical birth, but being born of God. Becoming a child of God, or being born of God, comes about by the way we respond to Jesus. If we reject him and refuse to believe in him we cannot become children of God. But if we do receive him, believing in his name, then we can become God's children. Belief in Jesus as the Christ is the condition necessary for us to become God's children: **"Every one who believes that Jesus is the Christ is a child of God" (1 John 5:1)**.

A Privileged Status

Becoming a child of God is a great blessing and privilege that involves responsibilities. As children of God our lives should reflect our spiritual rebirth and parentage. Love for God, love for one another and obedience of God's commands are just some of the responsibilities that are ours when we are children of God. John mentions these in **1 John 5:2**, **"By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments."** Being children of God involves us in loving relationships and obedience to God's commandments. The transformation that occurs in our lives when we become children of God should motivate us to live our lives in a way that befits our new status.



What do you think?

A Positive approach to Stress and Despair

The story is told of a London cabbie who was driving over Westminster Bridge late one night when he saw a man standing on the parapet about to jump into the river below. He stopped his cab, ran over to the man and pleaded with him not to jump. They talked for ten minutes about his problems and what was happening in the world – then both jumped off the bridge.

That is just a light-hearted story that illustrates two aspects of how stress and despair can destroy us emotionally to the point that we just do not know which way to turn. We need to appreciate first of all that stress and despair are common human problems. Secondly we need to understand that these emotions are highly contagious and Christians are no more exempt from these problems than they are from any other difficulty in life. The fact that God speaks to his people on these subjects reveals that we need to be aware of them and follow His advice when threatened by them.

First, we need to recognise that Satan will use stress and despair to take us away from God. Therefore we will need all of God's help to overcome these problems and a strong faith on our part is essential to see us through. We despair when we see no solution to our predicament and our lives spin out of control. We get stressed when we don't allow God to control us completely. We have to **learn** how to cope with them. Distractions and temptations come in many shapes and forms and we need God's wisdom, knowledge and foresight to be able to handle these and every situation in life. Paul tells us that he '**learned**' to be content (Phil. 4:11) and coping with despair and stress is very much part of man's learning process.

In the New Testament there are two words translated by our word 'despair'. The first is EXAPOREO, which means '*to be utterly without a way out*'. The second is APELPIZO, which is literally '*to hope away*', i.e. to give up in despair. This latter word is used in Luke 6:35 translated in the RSV as 'nothing despairing', or in the AV 'hoping for nothing again'. (Vine) Here we are taught to do good, to lend without holding on to the hope of a return. When Paul used the word EXAPOREO in 1 Cor. 1:8 with reference to the tough time he and his fellow workers faced in Asia, he said they were "**utterly and unbearably crushed and despaired of life itself**". They couldn't see any way out of their predicament (a common experience to many of us at times), but he goes on to say that this experience was to teach him greater reliance on the Lord.

So what Scriptures can help us when we are faced with these two problems? What can we do to help each other when these circumstances arise in life as they surely will?

1. We should "**encourage one another**". (1 Thess. 5:11; Heb 10:25)
1. Accept God's guidance in this real life situation; "**have no anxiety about anything.**" (Phil. 4:6)
3. "**Cast all your care on Him for he cares for you.**" (1 Pet 5:7; Ps 55:22)
4. "**Trust in God.**" (Ps 46: 1-3) Remember the hymn, 'God holds the key of all unknown and I am glad'? Then don't just sing the words – believe them!
5. "**Pray constantly.**" (1 Thess. 5:17; Col. 4:2) Talk to your Father earnestly about your problems.
6. "**Give thanks in all circumstances.**" (1 Thess 5:18) If you have a problem with this, remember it's your Father who is telling you to do this.

7. "Don't lose heart." (2 Cor 4:16-18; Heb 12:3)

Finally, when life is at its darkest and their seems no way forward, remember that:

- "God is faithful."
- "He knows your frame."
- "He is merciful and gracious."
- "He will never leave you nor forsake you."

(The writer, a brother in the Church, is known to the Editor but has asked not to be named on this occasion)

God is our Refuge

We are told that we shall suffer tribulation in this life and therefore we must experience its effect in despair or pain. Having been a Christian for over 40 years my view is that one regularly encounters situations that cause frustration and disappointment. We Christians would like to see God's will done on earth, and therefore we feel more grieved about wickedness than unbelievers do. But unlike them we can upload our problems to our Heavenly Father. We can tell Him exactly what we feel (he knows anyway) and we cannot pretend before Him to be better or more joyful than we really are. Prayer will give us patience to bear the situation and possibly suggest ways to deal with it; but in any case the outcome is in God's hands, not ours.

Sister Rose M. Payne

A Prayer for Patience

Lord, teach me the art of patience when I am well and give me the use of it when I am sick. In that day I will pray you will lighten my burden or strengthen my back. Our Heavenly Father, who has ordered our days that we live together in families, help us, that others may find us pleasant to live with... Teach us to be patient with those we cannot understand, to be considerate with those who serve us and to be loving to those who depend upon us... May we remember the burden of weakness and anxiety that other people are carrying and never add to that burden by our thoughtlessness or lack of sympathy.

(Author unknown)

Feeling God's presence

Anyone who knows me will tell you that I share with my husband a love of Pembrokeshire in South Wales, where we visit whenever possible. I am drawn back continually by the feelings of timelessness, changelessness and continuity. I find it easy to understand why, in earlier centuries, monks were drawn to live solitary lives in the sheltered caves in the cliffs, or to inhabit Caldey island, where the first Celtic monastery was founded. In the rugged beauty of this area the soul feels in union with God and His creation. Standing on the cliff tops overlooking a calm, sparkling sea, with skylarks above and the sun's brightness and warmth permeating you, it is easy to reflect on how God's glory will permeate us in Heaven, transfixing us and giving us a feeling of perfect peace and completeness, a sense that time no longer exists. (Rev 22:5)

This life, however, isn't all about holidays and beautiful scenery. It is also about some very difficult times and suffering, when we can feel beset with problems and our faith can be severely tested. It is then that we appreciate how wonderful it is to know that we have a God who, unlike the sun, isn't millions of miles removed from us. Our great Creator has been down in the depths of suffering too (Luke 22: 42-44) and he is with us in our hard times because he knows and understands them. To rework a common saying, 'God is for life, not just the good days'.

"My God is my rock, in whom I take refuge." (Psalm 18:2)

Margaret Marsden, Wigan

(NB. This piece wasn't specifically submitted for this feature but did seem appropriate alongside the other contributions. Editor)

News and Information

Ghana Appeal

The zeal of our Ghanaian brethren continues to bear fruit. Their interest, example and teaching increases interest amongst their neighbours so that baptisms continue and Churches grow.

One fast growing Church that now has seventy three attending their meetings, appeals for five English Bibles, 15 Bibles in local languages and ten benches. Can anyone help?

A primary school headteacher who is a leading Church member is seriously ill with typhoid fever. The congregation has grown to 47 members and has many interested visitors. These are just two examples of ongoing needs throughout Ghana that you have continued to help and letters of appreciation are received.

By supplying medical aid, the lives of brethren have been saved and they have gone on to preach the Gospel. Our Ghanaian brethren experience hardship but they are lovingly and actively dedicated to their Lord. We urge to continue to contribute to the welfare of the Churches in Ghana.

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

Nepal

Babarmahal Church of Christ, Khatmandu

Greetings to all of you and the brethren there in the Church in the UK. We are all fine here and doing well. We received all the tracts that you have sent us – thank

you so much. We want to preach the Gospel throughout Nepal. We teach and preach the Word of God to local congregations and we need many Bible materials in the Nepali language. So we are grateful for your good help for the Lord's work in Nepal. May God bless you richly.

Sister Carole (Ashurst) left funds for the Church. We have been spending it on evangelism and benevolence work in the local congregations. Preachers from local Churches are very pleased with the help that they receive from you. Please pray for Nepal nowadays. The situation is getting worse day by day. A recent Iraqi terrorist kidnapped and killed 12 innocent Nepalese young people. Now Nepalese people have great sorrow because of that incident. Maoist problems are also spreading everywhere in Nepal. The government is trying to talk to them but they are not positive. They are threatening both the government and people with violence. So we are praying continually for our citizens and country. We are very eager to evangelize the Gospel.

We look forward to seeing Sister Carole again here in Nepal and pray for her safety. Please write to encourage us; we will be praying for your wonderful ministry.

Thank you from your brothers and sisters from Babarmahal CoC. Elijah.

(The above is an email to the Ashurst family in Stretford, Manchester which Allan & Gretchen have passed on. It's another stark reminder of the difficulties that some brethren face in their work to spread the Gospel. Carole has visited several times to offer medical, financial and spiritual support. Can we remember this work, and our brethren in Nepal, in our prayers? Editor)

Woman's page

- Just a request to send some info about yourselves when you send in articles. That way I can get to know you, and

produce a more meaningful Woman's Page.

- Kim (my husband) and I are working on a woman's page on our website and will publish more info when it is up and running (hopefully not too far away).

- Another reminder that this is *your* page. No-one will laugh at you for the articles, although they might produce some stimulating discussions, which will contribute to our learning. So, please send your thoughts to me.

- I am planning a series on women in the Bible, probably for the next issue, so please send comments or views on women you think deserve mention or further study.

Coming Events

Kentishtown, London

October 2nd and 3rd, 2004

ANNIVERSARY MEETINGS

Speaker: Geoff Daniell (Bristol)

Saturday, 2nd, 3.00pm **Tea**

6.00pm **Gospel Meeting**

Sunday, 3rd – **Normal Services**

Newtongrange, Scotland

Saturday, October 9th, 2004

ANNUAL SOCIAL

Speaker: Graeme Pearson, Dunfermline

Meeting will start at 1.00 pm

**** Please note earlier time ****

Peterhead, Scotland

2nd & 3rd October 2004

A weekend of fellowship and thanksgiving to celebrate the opening of our new meeting hall.

Saturday 2nd: 3pm Fellowship
(followed by refreshments)

6pm Evening meeting

Sunday 3rd: 10am Bible Study
11am Breaking Bread
6pm Gospel Meeting

A warm welcome will be given to all. There is limited accommodation available which will be assigned on a first come first served basis.

Please contact: 01779 473046.

Stretford, Manchester

3 special Saturday meetings in the Green Hut, 538 Kings Road, STRETFORD, Manchester. Each meeting at 7.00pm followed by refreshments & discussion.

Saturday, September 25th 2004

Speaker: Ian Davidson, Motherwell, who will also speak

On Sunday morning 26th September at 11.00 am

Ian will speak at Argyle St, Hindley on Sunday evening at 6.00 pm

Saturday 23rd October 2004

Speaker: Ernest Makin, Wigan who will also speak on Sunday morning, 24th October at 11.00 am

Saturday 20th November 2004

Speaker: John Morgan, Hindley

THE SCRIPTURE STANDARD is published monthly.

PRICE PER COPY – POST PAID FOR ONE YEAR

UNITED KINGDOM. £10.00

OVERSEAS BY SURFACE MAIL. £10.00 (\$16.00US or \$20.00Can)

OVERSEAS BY AIR MAIL. £14.00 (\$22.00US or \$28.00Can)

PLEASE MAKE CHEQUES PAYABLE TO "SCRIPTURE STANDARD"

DISTRIBUTION AGENT & TREASURER:

JOHN K. KNELLER, 4 Glassel Park Road, Longniddry, East Lothian, EH32 0NY.

E-mail: john@kkneller.freemove.co.uk

Tel: 01875 853212 to whom change of address should be sent.

EDITOR: ROBERT MARSDEN, 4 The Copse, Orrell Road, Orrell, Wigan, England, WN5 8HL. Tel: 01942 212320 E-mail: Marsdenrob5@aol.com