

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"*

THE CROSS OF THE CHRIST

Some Musings on Calvary and the Christ Crucified

(Ernest Makin, Wigan)

"Many bulls compass me, strong bulls of Bashan surround me; they open wide their mouths at me, like a ravening and a roaring lion. I am poured out like water and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax, it is melted within my breast; my strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue cleaves to my jaw; you lay me in the dust of death. Yes dogs are round about me; a company of evildoers encircle me; they have pierced my hands and feet- I can count all my bones- they stare and gloat over me; they divide my garments among them, and for my raiment they cast lots."

The Suffering Servant

This extract from a Psalm of David, applicable to the suffering of the people of God of all ages, prophetically and in precise detail point to the Messiah as the 'suffering servant' to come. The above verses of Psalm 22 graphically illustrate the Messiah's agonising suffering and emotions while suspended on 'the accursed tree'. See Deuteronomy 21: 22/23.

On His predestined appointment with His murder, and making preparations for His final journey to Jerusalem, and on that fateful journey, Jesus prophesied the events of that awful day. **"As they were gathering in Galilee, Jesus said to them, 'The Son of Man is to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill Him, AND HE WILL BE RAISED ON THE THIRD DAY'. And they were greatly distressed."** Matthew 17:22,23. (See also Matthew 20:17-19)

Death by Roman crucifixion seems, according to medical opinion, to have included all the pain and suffering that man can devise in the torture of his fellowman - thirst, starvation, dizziness, cramp, traumatic fever, tetanus, sleeplessness, public

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humiliation and shame, a continuous torment of all that is almost unbearable, mortification of untended wounds, the anticipatory horror of the final 'coup de grace' and crucifixion does not provide the blessed relief of unconsciousness.

In the final moments leading up to His redeeming and substitutionary death, Jesus, still conscious and in control of His faculties uttered seven recorded sentences, a word of forgiveness, a word of salvation, an affectionate word, a seeming word of despair (I am of the opinion that this sentence is not a sign that He had been deserted by His Father but that it was a reference to Psalm 22 which His hearers, being Jews, would identify as a prophetic reference to the fact that Jesus was the Messiah; but this is a matter for another time), a cry of physical torment, after all He was a man, a word of triumph and a final sentence of His committal. (See Lk.23:34; Lk.23:43; John 19:26,27; Matt.27:46; John 19:28; John 19 30; and Lk.23:46)

The following extract is gleaned from Farrar's "Life of (the) Christ".

'The unnatural position (of the crucified) made every movement painful, the lacerated veins and crushed tendons throbbed with incessant anguish; the wounds inflamed by exposure, gradually gangrened; the arteries, especially of the heart and stomach became swollen and oppressed with surcharged blood; and while each variety of misery went on gradually increasing there was added to them the intolerable pang of a burning and a raging thirst.'

Our Substitute

While Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53 may give some insight into the experience at Calvary of the 'suffering servant' we cannot appreciate the shameful degradation, the agonies and trauma suffered by the 'Lamb of God'. It is imperative that the believer 'gets to know' Jesus so that by an increasing knowledge and a continuing acknowledgement of Him as Lord and Saviour our love for Him will increase in intensity. As our love intensifies so will our understanding and appreciation of Golgotha increase, as we realise the full price paid for our ransom and forgiveness and freedom from the righteous wrath of God. **"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."**

"I will divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong, because He poured out His soul unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet He bore the sin of many, and made intercession FOR the transgressors." (Isaiah 53: 12,13) The preposition 'for' literally means 'in the place of'. This scripture establishes that the cross was a place of 'ransom' – Jesus making the payment for believers' debt of sin; and also a place of substitution – Jesus endured the punishment that everyone deserves.

We do not know the physical form of the gibbet on which the Son of God died. It may have been:

1. the crux simplex – a single upright stake without a transom;
2. the crux decusata – a St. Andrew's cross;
3. the crux commissa – St. Anthony's cross; or
4. the crux commissa- the Latin cross.



But we do know, by prophetic utterance and direct gospel narrative that Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah, was tortured and died as our ransom and in our place. Both the apostles and the prophets testify to the validity of the cross and the crucifixion in the redemptive plan of God. These testimonies, with the chief cornerstone being the Christ, are the very foundation of the 'household of God'.

Redemptions Foundation

Unfortunately people with no spiritual commitment and even less understanding of the greatest event in history hang an emblematic cross on a gold chain around their necks. In 313 A.D. Constantine the Great claimed to have been converted by seeing a flaming cross in the heavens bearing the inscription; 'in hoc signo vinces' (by this sign you shall conquer). The following night, lo and behold, another Constantinian vision, in which Jesus appeared and instructed the emperor to create a Roman labarum (military standard) bearing the monogram of the Christ, i.e. the first two Greek letters of His name, X (CHI) and P (RHO) with the alpha and omega added. This standard blasphemously preceded every Roman legion into battle until the destruction of the Western Empire. Such has been the shameful, superficial and unedifying treatment of the cross of the Christ.

Jesus knew He had to face crucifixion and all the concomitant punishment. The Roman scourging pushed Him near to death; the God of love predetermined that the crucifixion was to take place; Jesus bore the pain and anguish without the exercise of His divine power.

"If you are the King of the Jews save yourself." It was because He was the Son of God, the king of the Jews that He endured the cross. If that divine power had been exercised by the summoning of many legions of angels the whole redemptive plan of a loving God, who had fixed a particular price for salvation, would have been jeopardised. He was the person described by the inscription above the cross. The full prescription must have read, **"THIS IS JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS."** (Remember that it was written in Greek, Hebrew and Latin, this fact reconciles the slight variations in the gospel narratives. Matthew wrote in Aramaic/Hebrew; Mark and Luke record it in its Latin form; and John uses the Greek form.)

All the redemptive gifts from God have their foundation in the cross of the Christ. Paul, one of the foremost ambassadors for Jesus said **"I decided to know nothing among you (the Corinthians) except Jesus the Christ and Him crucified"**. Paul also expressed his aversion to the world and his hatred for worldly affairs saying he faced an ongoing battle to crucify himself to worldly influences and temptations and that his 'only glory was in the cross of the Christ'.

The Significance of the Cross

To the believer the cross of the Christ is:

- (a) the place where his soul was ransomed- **"He gave Himself a ransom for all and the testimony was given at the proper time"**; see Galatians 4:4. See also Mark 10:45 and Hebrews 9:15
- (b) the place where the Son of God was crucified for him; **"He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him"**. See also John 6:51 and Romans 8:3
- (c) a place of -
 1. Propitiation (appeasement): "whom (Jesus) God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith; and this was to demonstrate His righteousness."
 2. Mediation: "for there is one God and one Mediator also between God and men, the man, Jesus the Christ, who gave Himself a ransom..."

3. Reconciliation: "while we were still helpless, at the right time the Christ died for the ungodly... not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus the Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation."
4. Justification: we are "justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in the Christ Jesus whom God displayed publicly..."



(N.B. We should not fight shy of words such as these, for they are the words of holy writ and it is the responsibility of the believer to understand them).

- (d) both a beginning and an ending. When the blood of our Lord flowed from His mangled body it signalled the point at which the 'Church of God' began. Addressing the Ephesian elders Paul instructed them to **"take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers to care for the Church of God', WHICH HE OBTAINED WITH THE BLOOD OF HIS OWN SON."** The sacrifice of Jesus ended all other sacrifices for sin. **"For it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats can take away sin."** It is a 'must' at this juncture to read Hebrews chapters 8,9 and 10. Why not read the whole letter?

Victory claimed

I have merely and inadequately skimmed the surface of God's love for us through the agonising cross of the Christ. Let me leave this article with the sound of victory ringing in your ears.

"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM MAY HAVE ETERNAL LIFE."

"Now is the judgement of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out, and, I when I am lifted up from the earth, shall draw all men to myself. HE SAID THIS TO SHOW BY WHAT DEATH HE WAS TO DIE."

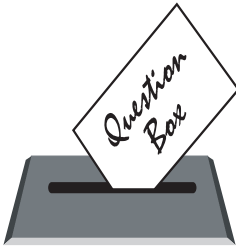
The hold of Satan on humanity has been irrevocably broken and Jesus, THROUGH HIS SUFFERING, reigns supreme.

"For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more now having been reconciled we shall be saved by His life."

A fitting conclusion to these musings would be for the reader to turn to the letter to the Ephesians and read the whole letter but pay particular attention to chapter 2 and verses 11 to 22.

"So then you are no longer strangers... but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, the Christ Jesus, HIMSELF, being the chief cornerstone in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit."

Hallelujah; what a Saviour!!



"In Hebrews 6:4-6, most translations use the phrase 'it is impossible to restore again to repentance' those who have 'tasted the goodness of the word' and then have fallen away. Their sin is 'to crucify again the Son of God on their own account'.

Please explain what it means to 'crucify again the Son of God', and, at what point in a person's 'falling away' do they become guilty of this?"

Here, then, are the two questions that have been asked.

- 1. What is meant by 'crucify again the Son of God'?**
- 2. When does one who falls away from the faith become guilty of this offence?**

A Brief Survey

I suggest that, before I attempt to answer these questions, we need to look at the verses to which they refer, in their proper context. Many years ago I was taught that, when studying a difficult passage of scripture, it is important to consider both what preceded and what followed it. In the case before us, there is, throughout this letter, a great deal of information that should help us to understand both the problem with which the writer is dealing and the message he sends to his readers.

We know, from the title, that this letter was written to Hebrews; that is, to Jews who had obeyed the Gospel. Whether it was sent to those living in Italy, or those still in Palestine and particularly in Jerusalem, is really not important.

What is important and what the writer makes very clear is that these Hebrew Christians had become discouraged and perhaps even disillusioned to the point of being ready to abandon the Christian Faith and return to their old Jewish religion.

Why Discouraged?

The reasons for this become evident when we read the letter.

- a) It seems that, when they were converted, these Jewish converts thought that the Gospel would take Judaism by storm and there would be a continuation of the mass conversions of those early days. But they had been disappointed.**

When this letter was written, probably 25 or maybe 30 years after the excitement of Pentecost had become history; nothing in Judaism appeared to have greatly changed. The old Jewish religion was still alive. The Temple in Jerusalem was still its vibrant centre, as Heb. 9:6 reveals. The Aaronic priesthood was still active and the daily sacrifices required by the Mosaic Covenant were still being offered. We learn this from Heb. 10:11.

b) Furthermore, these Hebrew Christians were doubtlessly unsettled by the followers of Judaism who delighted in pointing out that this new Faith had no Temple and no High Priest to represent its adherents before God. In fact, it had none of the ceremonies or the tangible symbols and visible emblems of religion, with which they had been brought up and to which they were accustomed.

In short, it seemed that the Hebrew converts to Christianity had cut themselves off from their historic past and from links with the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob of whom, as Hebrews, they were naturally proud.

The result was that they felt they had become nothing more than a little island of Christianity in a vast sea of Judaism, with the result that they had begun to have grave doubts about the step they had taken and were wondering if they had not made a grave mistake in leaving their old religion. Some, at least, were seriously considering abandoning faith in the Lord Jesus and going back to the Jewish faith.

It was in such circumstances that the writer issued the warning in chapter 6, which has given rise to the questions we have been asked to consider.

This is not the place at which to detail the numerous arguments advanced by the writer in order to convince these Hebrew Christians of the danger that lay in the course they were contemplating, but we might briefly notice that he constantly used the word '*better*', when comparing the two faiths; the one which was based on the Old Covenant ratified at Sinai, of which Moses was the mediator, and the other created by the New Covenant, mediated by the Son of God and ratified by the shedding of His blood at Calvary.

Remember that the word, which, in the Authorized Version is rendered '*better*', is the word '*kreisson*', occurring in the Greek text of this letter no fewer than 12 times in the 13 chapters. It means '*stronger*', or '*more powerful*', and it emphasizes the superiority of the New over the Old.

The Hebrew Christians were told that the new Faith is based on a ***better covenant***, ratified by a ***better sacrifice***, offering ***better promises*** and a ***better hope***, mediated by a ***better Prophet*** and has a ***better High Priest***.

Question 1. This is the clue that helps us to answer the first question concerning 'crucifying afresh the Son of God'.

Because, the Christian faith is, in every conceivable way, superior to the Old Jewish religion, the thrust of the warning issued in chapter 6:4-6 is that if these Hebrew Christians went back to Judaism, not only would they be returning to something that is old, out-dated, worn-out and effete, they would become guilty of an offence even more serious and sinful, because by deserting Christ, they would in effect be siding with those who crucified Him and saying that His enemies were right in calling Him a blasphemer and a deceiver. They would be agreeing that His death was nothing more than the death of a common criminal, and – worse still – they would be '*putting Him to an open shame*'. The Greek word used here – '*paradeigmatidzo*', is used just this one time in the N.T., but it also occurs in the Greek version of the Numbers 25:4, and

it means 'to expose to public ignominy and shame', as when the bodies of executed criminals were left hanging for all to see.

Obviously, there could be no possibility of the Lord Jesus actually being 'crucified again'. He died 'once for all'. But, for these Hebrew believers to reject the faith they had clearly embraced, the blessings of which they had certainly enjoyed, would be tantamount to 'crucifying Him afresh', and if they became guilty of this act, they would, indeed be **"holding Him up to contempt"**. (v.6).

This is the sin to which Heb.10: 26 refer. **"If we sin deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth there no longer remains a sacrifice for sin"**. Reject the sacrifice of Christ and forgiveness becomes impossible, because God has made that sacrifice the only basis and means of salvation.

I suggest that, when this letter was sent, matters had not yet reached that point, because in Heb. 6:9, the writer says, in effect, 'Although I am saying this, in your case I feel confident of better things'. He had reached a settled conclusion and did not believe that they would become guilty of so terrible an act, and he even speaks affectionately, calling them 'Divinely loved ones' using the word 'beloved' for the only time in this letter.

Question 2. "When does one who falls away from the faith become guilty of this offence?"

I do not think that the specific offence with which this letter deals is one which we commit today. It was a form of sin, or transgression, to which those early Hebrew converts were uniquely exposed, and the passage describes a situation that for the majority of us does not exist.

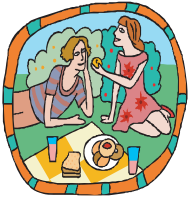
This does not mean, of course, that a present-day Christian cannot fall-away from the faith and become 'lost' again, even though there are religious groups and writers who deny the possibility of apostasy, declaring 'once saved – always saved; once in grace, always in grace'.

I must admit that I cannot understand how anyone can read the New Testament and reach such a notion! I imagine that we all know people who once embraced the Christian faith and obeyed the Gospel, but later, for whatever reason, became unfaithful and left the Church. Of course those who hold the view to which I have just referred have a very easy explanation! They would say that those who fell away were never really saved – never really Christians in the first place!

But if their doctrine is true, we have to wonder why the writer of the Hebrew letter was so concerned about those people described in the passage at which we have been looking if they were never in real danger!

However, I have run out of space, and the question concerning the possibility of apostasy is one that must be left for another 'Question Box'!

**Questions please to: Frank Worgan,
11 Stanier Road, Corby, Northants, NN17 1XP.**



woman to woman

OK so Bob twisted my arm! Not really... he just looked at me pleadingly and it had the same effect.

In that sentence is a tacit acknowledgement that we, men and women, are different. It was our God, the great designer, who created us that way. We were created as a help *meet* for man. I wouldn't dare suggest that God had to make a prototype to get the superior creation... !!

We (men and women) are a synergistic whole i.e. two components working to best effect when combined. Apparently it was a mature, spiritual man who had suggested we had a page for women – again in acknowledgement that we have different strengths and weaknesses, different needs, different outlooks.

That said, I am not going to be editing this page and the reason is... (DRUM ROLL!!!!)

I have a chronic illness!

Now those may be 5 little words to you but to me they are the equivalent of standing up at an AA meeting and confessing to be an alcoholic for over 20 years. It's like 'coming out'.

Those who know me best and love me most have been aware of this for many years and in varying degrees have tried to understand and support me. They haven't allowed the illness to define me. I have been so unwilling to allow that to happen that I have perhaps made fewer allowances for myself than anyone. That's another story...

After suffering a period of virulent viral activity after the birth of my second child, I was hospitalised twice and would often be bed-bound for weeks. After a relatively settled period I tried to return to part-time work as a primary teacher, a job I loved. One day I collapsed in class after having enjoyed a kick-about with some children at playtime. I was diagnosed with M.E. That was the end of my teaching career and thought at the time I didn't realise it, it was the beginning of a whole new way of life, into which I must admit, I was carried kicking and crying. I hated being ill. I still do... but I have learned that illness can produce challenges and growth. Though these lessons have been formed from my own circumstances, I am sure that in this busy, chaotic world we can all take some lessons to ourselves.

Blessed are those who trust in the Lord... They are like trees planted along a river bank, with roots that reach deep into the water. Jeremiah 17:7 (NLT)

Here then are some of the lessons:

- **I've had to learn that God created me to be a human *being* not a human *doing*;**

- I'm not a good patient. I find it very hard to accept help. I find it's hard to acknowledge I need it. I've had to learn that is sometimes more gracious to receive that to give;
- **I have learned more about that wonderful word ACCEPTANCE. I didn't plan the life I have but I have learned to accept and live the life that I have got;**
- I'm not reliable – I'd love to be... I don't know how I'm going to be in the morning or evening of the same day let alone the next week or month. It stops you making plans but it teaches you to live in the moment.
- **It could be used as an excuse not to participate in life but you learn to differentiate between hope and expectation. You need to stay involved with people and events outside yourself. You start articles like this not knowing when (or if) you'll finish!!**

I've also tried to learn:

- that worry is totally unproductive and a waste of already limited resources;
- **that as long as you are aware of alternatives and options you are never helpless;**
- to dump the words 'should' and 'what if' out of my vocabulary;
- **to refuse to deal with irrational guilt or old hurts;**
- that doing your best is ALWAYS good enough. No one can ask for more;
- **to look for the roses in the midst of the compost heap;**
- that there is freedom in accepting limitations as well as strengths;
- **that my power and purpose is in and through the Lord (Phil 4:13)**



Maybe you would like to suggest or review a book that you found enjoyable or inspirational... A few of us at Longshoot share or suggest good books to read, either spiritual or secular. We have recently read the intriguing novel "The Five People you Meet in Heaven" by Mitch Albom....and we loved it!

My mouth says I will take on this task but my head (finally) knows it can't. I do however think that we should encourage one another in whatever way we can. Maybe this will set the ball rolling... now it's up to us to gather some momentum.

Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint. (Isaiah 40:31)

As Isabel states in the above contribution, though she has the will, she simply does not have the reliability (her word) to take on the task of editing a '**woman to woman**' page. However I think she has given an indication of what is achievable if someone will take on the role of gathering content and preparing it for publication. It isn't difficult, but is rewarding. However this must be my final appeal through these pages. Editor

The Growing Church 5

In His Image

(Alastair Ferrie, Dundee)

In this particular series of lessons we have been focussing on the idea of **THE GROWING CHURCH**. In particular we have been looking at the description of the growing church as contained in Ephesians 4. Here is the secret, the Biblical secret of how we restore the church of the New Testament. Not just in a doctrinal sense, as important as that is, but in spirit and essence. It is not enough to academically restore the church of the New Testament, we want it restored in actuality, in reality. And to do so we have to recreate the character and essence of the New Testament Church. Only then will our work of restoration be complete.

A. The Hidden Secret of the Growing Church:

As we turn back to Eph 4 in this series of lessons on Eph 4 we are concentrating on the words of one particular verse, in this case v15.

Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.. (Eph 4:15)



In this short verse is contained a great secret which is at the very heart of our whole purpose in this series. This is the secret of recreating the growing church of the New Testament.

- **It is not a quick fix.**
- **It is not an easy answer.**
- **It is not a fancy programme to be adopted.**
- **It is not something we could write up in the Gospel Advocate or Christian Worker and get everyone on to using... just clip out the coupon and enclose a cheque for £20 and you are guaranteed to reproduce the New Testament Church.**

As we examine this passage today we see that the goal of the church is to grow up. It is to grow up into the image of Christ. The heart of the passage is contained in the use of a verb in this particular verse. It is a verb that is not easily translated. But here in the RSV we have it translated... Speaking the truth...

Speaking the truth = *aletheuo*.

W. E. Vine says that this signifies to deal faithfully or truly with anyone. The Greek word is not easily translated. More is implied than simply speaking the truth of God's Word. One commentator has put it this way... The noun has become a verb... It means "Truthing it!" It is not enough to just speak the truth. It must be an integral part of one's daily life. The mature Christian "truths it" in everything he does.

He is so utterly genuine in his belief in the superiority of the way of life taught by Jesus Christ that he literally LIVES THE TRUTH!

In this one verse Paul has identified the ultimate and unsurpassable evangelistic methodology. Whenever we accept the responsibility to help every member to mature in Christ so that all are consistently **"truthing it"** in love, the church cannot help but grow.

B. The Biblical Church Growth Programme:

As Christians strive toward the standard of Christ in every aspect of their lives, evangelism is removed from the "program of the church" arena; it becomes a part of everyone's daily life. Evangelism becomes a natural and inbuilt part of the very existence of the church and hence becomes a core activity that stems from the very nature of the heart of the church. Then and only then will the church, represented by every one of its members, become a dynamic force in the community for truth and right and love.

Living and speaking the truth in love is just another way of saying "living like Christ."

We must understand that our evangelistic responsibility is not satisfied because the church where we attend..

- **has a campaign every summer**
- **hosts gospel meetings**
- **has a Sunday night gospel meeting**
- **has an evangelist supplied to us or even partially helps to support an evangelist**
- **has a leaflet distribution every now and then**



It will be satisfied by the membership truly **"truthing it"** and hence reflecting the glory of Christ in their lives and hence attracting others to become Christians also. This is what it is going to take to become the growing church that God wants us to be.

In this way, and possibly only in this way is it that the church will fulfil the mission of the church in this age.

To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all men see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose which he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and confidence of access through our faith in him. (Eph 3:8-12)

How is it that the church might show forth the manifold wisdom of God?

- **Is it by the force of our arguments?**
- **Is it by the persuasiveness of our preaching?**
- **Is it the décor of our church building?**
- **Is it by the dress code of our presiding brethren?**
- **Is it because we sing like the Mormon Tabernacle Choir?**

- **Is it because we host the finest Ladies' Days?**

In the last analysis all of the above will make a difference to some people, but they are not the determining factor as far as the growth of the church is concerned.

Paul says here in this passage below that it will be because we have taken on the image of Christ.

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into His likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. (2 Cor 3:18)

The church is the place where people are in the business of being changed from one degree of glory to another.

They are being changed from a likeness to fleshly man into a likeness of the heavenly Man.

This is not a sort of peripheral by-product of the church; it is what the church is all about. This is the core activity of the church. This is the mission statement of the church. Sometimes we think the mission statement of the church is contained in the great commission and there is an element of truth in that, but the real mission statement of the church is to take fallen man and make him like the Christ. In so doing the great commission will automatically be fulfilled.

"His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, that through these you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion, and become partakers of the divine nature. ... For whoever lacks these things is blind and shortsighted and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. Therefore, brethren, be the more zealous to confirm your call and election, for if you do this you will never fall; so there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. (2 Pet 1:3-11)

The church is the place where people are happily **putting on the divine nature**. God's plan for you is that you become like Jesus. Nothing less! And in putting on the divine nature then you will fulfil the potential that you have to be His child.

No wonder the Church of Christ is a blessed place to be,

- **it is a blessed place by design and by the intent of God...**
- **it is a blessed place because here are people being changed to become like Jesus**
- **and the more they become like Jesus the more blessed a place the church is.**
- **And the more blessed a place that it is the more likely that it is that it will grow.**

Growth is not a programme of the church it is an innate characteristic of the church.

“You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trodden under foot by men. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. (Matt 5:13-14)

Evangelism and growth will spring naturally from the nature of the church.

- **If the church truly is salty, truly is filled with light, it cannot help but be successfully evangelistic.**
- **If it is full of darkness, and insipid, then there is nothing that it can do, no matter how energetically it is pursued that will make it successfully evangelistic.**
- **We may have some measure of success... even Jehovah’s Witnesses by great industry convert some, and they have virtually no light whatsoever.**

Conclusion:

I feel that what I have had to say in this lesson is very significant. It is not significant because I thought of it, it is significant because it is Biblical. It is a Biblical statement about the fundamental nature of the church and that makes it significant. This fundamentality is at the very heart of what it takes to make the growing church.

Perhaps I am suggesting something pretty important here. That the reason at times the church is not so much a growing church as it should be is not due to the cleverness or dedicated nature of our evangelistic programmes or our evangelistic campaigns or gospel meetings, as it is to do with the spiritual nature of our church.

And hence may I suggest some things which come out of this little study and observation.

- 1. The Growing Church does not depend on technological innovation.**
- 2. The Growing Church does not depend on psychological approaches.**
- 3. The Growing Church does not depend on becoming more energetic.**
- 4. The Growing Church does depend on individual spiritual growth in the Body.**
- 5. The Growing Church does depend on individual progress in becoming more like Jesus.**
- 6. The Growing Church does depend on the church focusing not on that which is symptomatic but addressing the real health need of the church.**
- 7. The Growing Church does depend on us putting in place spiritual leadership.**
- 8. The Growing Church does depend on the spiritual, leading the members of the Body to become more spiritual in themselves.**
- 9. The Growing Church does depend on our individual love for God driving us to become more like Him.**
- 10. The focus of the Growing Church will be on loving God, and getting closer to God.**
- 11. This can only be accomplished through those who do know God and are closer to Him.**
- 12. The Growing Church is divine in nature and essence. All the rest follows automatically.**



Foundations of the Faith

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

MATTERS OF FIRST IMPORTANCE

(Graham Gorton, Stretford)

In the epistle of Jude, the writer urged his fellow Christians to “.....contend earnestly for the faith once for all entrusted to the saints....” A body of teaching was to be asserted and defended and in this article we are looking at what that teaching consists of.

CREEDS

In the early centuries of the Christian era, various heresies arose in the churches. Some of these are evident as we read the New Testament scriptures. Attempts were made in those early days to summarise the foundation of core truths that were considered to be indisputable. Creeds were written to present “the faith” in summary form and to counter heresies. Three of these statements of belief are still in use in some major Christian denominations.

- The Apostles Creed, attributed by tradition to the apostles of Christ;
- The Nicene Creed, formulated at the Council of Niceae in 325AD; and
- The Athanasian Creed, written at about the same time as the Nicene Creed, and attributed to Athanasius, a bishop in Alexandria.

The last is a long statement, framed in a legalistic way, whilst the first two are more concise and generally follow Biblical teaching. What they had in common was an attempt to express foundational truths in a relatively concise way.

BIBLICAL TRUTHS

In the New Testament we have ‘gems’ of articles of faith that we can identify as indisputable and fundamental to an understanding of “...the faith once for all entrusted to the saints..” Some examples that spring to mind are:

- Peter’s assertion about the identity of Christ found in Matt 16:16 – **“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”**
- John’s statement (according to most translations) about the nature of God’s grace in John 3:16 - **“For God so loved the world that He gave his only Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”**
- Paul’s testimony written to Timothy recorded in 1 Tim 1:15 – **“The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.”**

All of these refer to the fundamental truths about Jesus, His status and His mission. Others, which complement Old Testament statements (c.f. Psalm 119), point to the inspiration of the Scriptures and our proper approach to them. Consider the following statements:

- Jesus in his prayer to the Father on behalf of the disciples in John 17:17 –

“Sanctify them in the truth; thy word is truth.”

- Paul’s advice to Timothy as to how he should conduct himself in his ministry in 2 Tim 2:15 – **“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.”**
- Paul again in his assertion to Timothy about the source of the Word in 2 Tim 3:16 – **“All scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”**

The apostle, Paul, wrote two letters to the Christians at Corinth and in the first letter he drew to their attention the issues “..of first importance..” (1 Cor 15:3), namely:

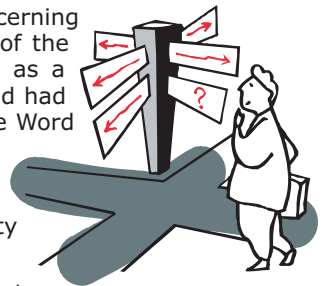
- ✓ That Jesus died for our sins
- ✓ That he was buried
- ✓ That he was raised on the third day
- ✓ And that there were witnesses to this amazing fact.

Further, Paul insists that these events were in accord with the scriptures.

It is almost beyond comprehension that there are (and have always been in all probability) those who profess to be Christians, but reject some of these fundamental truths.

THE CHURCH AT CORINTH

Why did Paul write this brief summary of truths concerning Jesus? The answer lies in the context of the problems of the Corinthian Church at this time. They were established as a Church under the ministry of Paul, Silas and Timothy and had benefited for a year and a half of Paul teaching them the Word of God. (Acts 18: 1-11) It is not hard to imagine Paul’s sadness and frustration when a short time later he had to pen this first letter to Christians who had become factional, litigious in secular courts, lax in sexual morality and abusive of the Lord’s Supper.



In the 15th chapter, Paul brings them back to the vital truths.

He reminds them of the Gospel they had received and upon which they had taken their stand and which saved them, and their need to hold firmly to the message they had embraced.

THE CHURCH TODAY

There is a lesson here, vital for every Christian and for every Christian congregation. Whatever malaise or sin overtakes us – a reminder of the “things of first importance” is the beginning of the way back. These verses in 1 Corinthians 15 speak of ‘first importance’. What other truths then are important? Well, many, of course, but without a grounding in an understanding of Jesus and what, at enormous personal cost, he has done for each one of us, our growing up into Christ and full appreciation of ‘the faith’ cannot begin.

However if we **are** anchored in these fundamentals and committed to Jesus, then we can truly **“.. run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God...”** (Hebrews 12:1,2)

News and Information

Ghana Appeal

Thanks to brethren whose donations have been of such great help to the Lord's Church in Ghana. As well as saving lives through medical aid the number of new congregations has increased. Many have been shown the way of salvation and obediently accepted it.

The brother who cannot attend to his farm after his hernia repair operation is using his time to establish another church elsewhere. As his income has ceased due to his physical condition we have paid his expenses, as well as the cost of bills, study materials and benches to sit on.

A congregation requests funds for Bibles and hymn books in the local language, as well as benches. This is needed for the increasing number of new converts and others attending meetings out of interest. When a brother brought a lady to Christ a number of years ago she expressed concern about her friend on the other side of Ghana and we paid his expenses to go there for one week. By

the end of that week he had established a church of nine, which has grown and reached out to begin other churches. They have just informed us of another five baptisms. We have just received news of another congregation reaching out to another village where Bibles, hymnbooks and study materials are needed.

Because of this increase throughout Ghana we are compiling a new directory. Much is being achieved but this is limited by the funds available. With more resources our Ghanaian brethren could achieve even more. With such great potential it is sad to see such fruitful increase being limited when we know there are so many people we have not been able to reach. We appeal to your generosity to continue this good work and, if at all possible, to increase it. On behalf of our Ghanaian brethren we sincerely thank you.

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**

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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: bob.rock@virgin.net