

# The SCRIPTURE STANDARD

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

## *Editorial* **The Quality of Christian love**

Christianity and love are inextricably linked. Amongst the many references to love within the pages of the Bible there is surely none more compelling in the richness and pointedness of its language than in the often quoted 13th chapter of Paul's first letter to Corinth because it sets love as the very essence of the Christian ethic. Without love, all our fine words have as much coherent sense and virtue as a noisy gong. Without love, every power of prophecy, every revelation that may have been claimed, all knowledge and even

the uttermost faith is rendered meaningless. Without love, even the most extravagant act of sacrificial giving is of no gain whatsoever. Without question, love is the purest and highest expression of the spiritual nature and the very essence of the new relationship ushered in by Jesus.

Our capacity for love is the heartbeat of our Christianity. John makes it quite clear in his first epistle that the person who claims to know God but does not love is a sham. Such is the fundamental importance of this statement that I have tried to approach it from the point of view of the sceptic, to find some way of making the statements of John mean something other than what they appear to dictate. However hard I have tried though, it is impossible to escape the simple truth of John's statement. If we do not love, we do not know God. To say that we know the God who is love, but fail to show in our lives the fruits of that knowledge of God, is a contradiction.

### Some dilemmas

Any consideration of Christian love, though, presents some challenges. Many preachers and teachers have stated something along the lines of, "Christian love

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is a love which the world knows nothing about". To the extent that this statement differentiates Christian love from the sentimental, romantic or lustful 'love' that is common currency in the world, then there is no difficulty whatsoever in making the contrast. Where it becomes much more difficult is when non-Christians display, as they undoubtedly do, acts of genuine, unfettered love that might even put many Christians to shame.

Over the centuries many people have made the ultimate sacrifice out of love. One could equally think of the thousands of non-Christian carers who devote their lives to looking after sick or disabled relatives or friends; the non-Christians who go onto our city streets to provide care and support for the homeless; those who devote their lives and careers to bringing aid to starving, sick and impoverished people around the world at great risk to their own health and prosperity. Think of people who have opened up their families to provide foster care to children or who have dedicated themselves to providing and maintaining facilities to give disadvantaged children and/or adults some care and support in life.

Surely we cannot conclude that because some of these people are not Christians, these are not acts of love! Equally, however, our theology will not allow that people are Christians **simply because** they show love. So we seem to be left with the dilemma of people of the world demonstrating acts of love that are consistent with the principles of what we would recognise as Christian love. And yet according to John the love that the Christian must demonstrate in life is dependent on God's abiding presence (1 John 4:16), the gift of his own Spirit (4:13) and the confession of Jesus as the Son of God. (4:15)

If we accept, as I think we must, the genuineness of many of the actions described above, then in reality the differentiation of Christian love can only be one of degree. We have been exposed, through our knowledge of God's love for us, literally to the greatest expression of love ever performed. Never before did the God of creation, offer himself up as a sacrifice; never before did the sinless stand as a substitute for the sinful; never before did one person carry the whole burden of sin on behalf of mankind. The extent of that love is 'spiritually discerned' and it is in that context alone that we can speak of a love 'that the world knows nothing about' – because by definition the world does not 'know' the love of God manifested in Jesus. So yes, non-Christians can act out of deep love, but can never do it from a knowledge of the love of God.

God's love for mankind.

What then can we learn about love from God's love for mankind? Well first of all it was **unconditional**. There was no sense that God reciprocated our love to him. The initiative was all on the part of God. **"God showed his love toward us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us."** And as John reminds us, **"In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us as and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins."**

Secondly it was based on **need**. God's love was not drawn out because he saw something desirable in the fractured relationship with the Father caused by mankind's disobedience. It wasn't because he had any affection for what he saw. In fact at one time prior to the Flood Satan had taken such a hold over the world that the book of Genesis records that **"the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was**

**filled with violence.”** Imagine the dagger plunged through the spiritual heart of a loving heavenly Father who had to conclude, **“that he was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to the heart.”** This is said of God’s defining work, the highest form of creation, which had been made in his own image.

Thirdly, God’s love would be **sacrificial** and involve inexpressible pain and anguish. The situation that God’s plan of salvation addressed was not one that required a few soothing words to heal a rift; it wasn’t a problem that the offender could sort out by taking along a bouquet of flowers and a box of chocolates as a gesture of remorse; even the most tear-stained, heartfelt act of repentance on the part of mankind could not suffice. Indeed the reality is that nothing that mankind could do was ever going to be enough to set aside the ransom.

These then are some of the characteristics of God’s love that begin to define for us the type of love that we are called to demonstrate in our lives – unconditional, needful, self-sacrificing love.

### Christian, ‘agape’, love – the practice

In terms of what this means for us, Jesus himself set the standard as he spoke to his disciples. **“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another.”** Christian love is not to be likened to sentimentality and notions of romance. It is not even about expressions of commitment or living in a world in which everything is full of wonder, beauty and romance as many books and films so readily depict.

As one reflects on the nature and character of the love of God a pattern emerges that helps us achieve an understanding of the true nature of love. It demands that we face up to the often harsh realities of our Christian experience so that we do accommodate each others failings and weaknesses as we struggle for spiritual growth; it means that love can still find expression when our emotions are being shredded and traumatic times are being faced; it means that sometimes we have to break down our own barriers and subdue our natural inclinations so that we can show love to the unlovely.

Much has been written about Jesus’ prayers to the Father in the Garden of Gethsemane. Was it really the desire of Jesus that he should not go ahead with the plan of the Father? That the plan of salvation should remain unfulfilled? Or is the more likely reality not that despite the knowledge of his impending sacrifice, the God of love could only take that action which secured the eternal good of those that he overwhelmingly loved.

Acts of love are often accompanied by pain, frustration and tears. **“For God so loved the world that he GAVE His only Son...”** God’s love, perfected in Jesus through his obedience to the will of the Father, shows us that true love is when we serve the needs of others in preference to our own needs. That was the whole context of the life of Jesus on earth. Love hurts and as Jesus knows better than all, love hurts very sorely indeed. We should not be unduly surprised or downhearted when this ideal does not come easily. Sometimes in pursuit of this great ideal we may have to metaphorically fight, scratch and claw our way through some of our most natural and self-serving instincts to achieve this quality of love. It isn’t always pretty, but it is the ultimate fulfilment of our Christian calling.

# Word Study THE LOGOS

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The Greek word *logos* is found frequently in the N.T. Scriptures. Robert Young in his *Analytical Concordance to the Holy Bible* (A.V.) advises that it is translated "word" 208 times. *Logos* can be seen in such English words as logic, logarithm and logistics. It is interesting to note that almost all sciences append the suffix -*logy*, although not all words that end in -*logy* refer to sciences. Analogy, tautology, eulogy, trilogy are good examples of non-scientific words. Biology, archaeology, ornithology, entomology, geology, zoology, meteorology, physiology, bacteriology and psychology are good examples of scientific words. Theology is a word I wish to highlight. It comes from the two Greek words: *theos*, God and *logos*, word, speech, discourse. So theology is literally "the Word of God". Jesus is given this title in the book of Revelation. We read: "And He was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and His name is called The Word of God". (19:13). Christians are often asked to outline their theology on certain subjects. Actually, in the final analysis, the Christian's theology is a person - Christ Jesus. Theology riding a white horse! Now that's enough to confuse a lot of so-called modern theologians.

## THE WORD WAS GOD

I wish to consider in this article the use of *logos* by John in the first chapter of his gospel record. We read: **"In the beginning was the Word (*Logos*), and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made. In Him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in darkness; and the darkness has not overcome it...And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth."** (1:1-5, 14) These are undoubtedly some of the most outstanding verses of the Bible.

The apostle John wrote differently from Matthew, Mark and Luke, whose records are described as "the synoptic gospels". John compiled his gospel record at a later date. By then, the good news was facing challenges both from the Jewish world and the Gentile world. A major challenge came from the Gnostic philosophy, which was pagan in origin, and combined elements of Western intellectualism and Eastern mysticism. In fact, Gnosticism was more than a challenge: it was a very real danger to the early Church. Paul had already dealt with problems pertaining to circumcision; clean and unclean meats; the gift of tongues; the resurrection; etc. Now the apostle John had to address different issues. Personally, I believe that God spared John to deal the death-blow to the cult of Greek mysticism.

## WORD, MIND AND REASON

The *Logos* had both a Jewish and Gentile background. To the Jews, words were powerful, creative things. This view goes right back to the book of Genesis. After all, we read again and again in Genesis 1, 'And God said...' The Greeks also believed that the *Logos* was the creating and guiding and directing power of God. But the *Logos* was not only the Word of God, he was also the Mind of God and the Reason of God. The Stoics, for example, said: 'All things are controlled by the *Logos* of God. The *Logos* is the power, which puts sense into the world; the power, which makes the

world an order instead of a chaos; the power, which set the world going and keeps it going in its perfect order...The *Logos* pervades all things'.

John declared that the *Logos* became a person, whom he had seen and with whom he had laboured for three years during His eventful ministry on earth. That person was none other than Jesus of Nazareth. Someone wrote of the Master: 'Jesus did not merely quote passages or read Scriptures, although He sometimes did both; but He translated the Word into life. The Word became virile, vital and vigorous. It lived and moved and had being.' I also copied these words from somewhere: 'We were made flesh by the Word of God, and then the Word was made flesh to become like us. He shared our lot so we could share His life. He came down that we might be lifted up.' God in human form – what a tale to tell! And John was willing to tell it despite resistance, hostility and persecution.

## FULL OF GRACE AND TRUTH

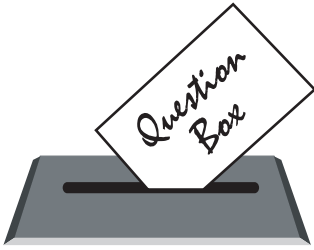
The *Logos*, said John, was **"full of grace and truth"**. (1:14). I believe that when Jesus came into the world grace and truth came in perfection. Everything about Jesus was perfection. How then could the sinless or perfect one end up on a cross? This is a good question. It staggers the mind to think that many of His fellow human beings at the time could not see Jesus for what He truly was - the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. It equally staggers the mind to think that so many today still do not see Jesus of Nazareth as the Saviour of the world. What more could He have done to prove He was Immanuel (God with us)? I believe He did everything possible. Unbelievers, therefore, are without excuse. As Alexander Campbell once said: 'The infidel or unbeliever is but the incarnation of a negative idea. He is absolutely but a mere negation. He stands to Christianity as darkness stands to light. Is darkness anything? Is blindness anything but the loss of sight? Is unbelief anything but the repudiation of evidence?'

People learn best by demonstration. To see Jesus in action is to see God in action. Jesus Himself went on to say: **"No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him."** (John 1:18) In this world, Jesus simply went about doing good and we must do likewise. Everyone should look up to Him and try to follow in His footsteps. He has shown us the way. He has shown us how to live. He has shown us how to please God. He has even shown us how to die. His help, support and guidance are guaranteed for all those who love and serve Him. He promised the Holy Spirit to all those who obey Him and He has been true to His word and faithful to His promise. He will never leave us nor forsake us. In times of trial He will bring peace; in times of trouble He will bring comfort; in times of despair He will bring hope. There really is no one like Jesus. Everyone, therefore, should love Him, worship Him and serve Him.

## CLOSING REFLECTIONS

Jesus is the *Logos* – the Word of God, the Reason of God and the Mind of God. Jesus, therefore, should influence our speech, our reasoning and our thinking. **"Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer every man."** (Colossians 4:6); **"And Paul reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks."** (Acts 18:4); **"...casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."** (2 Corinthians 10:5)

# Christianity and Islam



## Introduction



In recent months we have been made acutely aware of the existence of the Islamic religion. Every newspaper and almost every news-

bulletin has had something to say about certain individuals who have been called 'Islamic extremists', and the word 'Crusade' has frequently been heard – and always used by these same people.

It may be helpful to write something about the Islamic faith, so that we may remind ourselves of the situation with which we have to deal.

It was after the fall of the Eastern Roman Empire that, in 632 A.D., the Islamic armies launched the attack on the West. Their victorious advance westward was finally halted by Charles Martel, of France, at the battle of Poitiers in 732 A.D., but the conflict only ended 150 years after it had commenced, in 782 A.D., when the Caliph of Baghdad, Haroun al Rashid, entered into friendly correspondence with the rulers of the Western world.

This did not mean that the threat of Islam was over. It was not over *then*. It is not over *today*, as people are beginning to realize; although it is amazing how little Christians – and indeed, Western nations generally - seem to know about the Moslem religion, which, at least in the Third World countries, is the fastest growing religion on earth.

Even in the United Kingdom it is gaining an increasingly stronger foothold, as people from the Middle East and Far Eastern countries arrive here. I do not think that anyone can object to an examination of the Islamic faith, because when committed, militant Moslems enter *any country*, they do so as missionaries for their faith whose aim is to bring it to submission to that faith. Indeed, the very word, '*Islam*' means '*submission*', and the name '*Moslem*' or '*Muslim*' indicates '*one who surrenders*'.

You may have seen the headlines in a recent issue of one of our national daily newspapers, which showed young Moslem men displaying a banner that declared, "*Islam will rule the world*", and, as recently as February this year, 2004, Denmark granted visas to 200 Moslem 'missionaries' – this is the word actually used in the "Times" report; and the same report described about 30 of these new-comers as 'Imams'; that is, 'leaders'.

We, in this country, are such a hospitable people that the general public does not seem to be aware of the danger that this constitutes. For whatever reason, whether because of the sheer ignorance of those of our politicians who are not themselves religious, or for reasons of political expediency, the powers-that-be appear to be unconcerned.

The fact is that the freedom to build mosques and community-centres that is granted to Moslems in this country, is denied to Christians living in countries such as Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, that have Islamic governments or rulers. In such countries Christians are blatantly persecuted and even murdered by militant Moslems.

In a recent letter in the "Times", a businessman reported that, on his arrival in the Saudi capital, Riyadh, his Bible was taken from his luggage by Customs officials and torn up, and he was personally physically assaulted.

## Islam's Origins

We tend to forget that the Arab tribes, who were used by Mohammed to fight his 'holy wars', had a form of religion even before he made his appearance. It was a religion, based on strange interpretations of familiar Old Testament stories, which later were woven into Islamic doctrine.

For instance, Moslem teachers claim that, after being banished from the Garden in Eden, Adam and Eve were separated. Adam found himself on a mountain in Ceylon, whilst Eve was in Arabia, on the borders of the Red Sea. They are said to have wandered the earth for 200 years before being allowed to meet up again on Mount Ararat, which, Moslem teachers claimed, is '*not far from the city of Mecca*', and, since many of their followers knew little about the world's geography, this obvious error was readily believed. Mecca is in Saudi Arabia, whilst Mt. Ararat is in Turkey, something like 1000 miles away to the Northwest.

Furthermore, Moslem teaching says that, in repentance, Adam pleaded with God for mercy and asked that he might be given a place in which he could worship Him, and his prayer was answered.

A Temple, like one which they claim exists in Heaven, was formed out of the clouds and lowered to earth by angels, and every day Adam walked around this Temple seven times, just as the angels walk around the heavenly Temple. When Adam died, this 'Temple of the Clouds' was drawn back up to Heaven, but Seth his son, built another just like it, made out of stone and clay. This temple, they claim, was washed away in the Flood.

The next stage in this strange re-working of Bible history, says that many years later, when Hagar and Ishmael, her son, were dying of thirst after having run away from the camp of Abraham, an angel revealed a spring of water which saved their lives, and this Well, which they claim to have identified is regarded as sacred by the Moslems to this very day. It is claimed that where the well was discovered is where, shortly after the discovery, the city of Mecca was built.

Personally, I find this to be very strange, since, according to Gen.21: 14, Hagar the Egyptian and Ishmael her son had been expelled from Abraham's encampment at the insistence of Sarah, and had '*wandered in the Wilderness of Beersheba*'. They were clearly heading back to Egypt, from whence Hagar had originally come, and they were in need of water, because the water Hagar was carrying was used up. They

could not possibly have travelled very far from Abraham's encampment, which at that time was in Southern Canaan.

In fact, the last we read about Hagar is that she took a wife for Ishmael *from Egypt*, and that he '*lived in the wilderness of Paran*' (Gen.21: 21). How the well found its way from the Wilderness of Beersheba to Mecca needs to be explained!

Islamic teaching further claims that later, when Ishmael had grown to manhood, God commanded him to build the Kaaba – the most sacred building in the Islamic religion, and it was to be built on the *exact spot* where the Temple of the Clouds is said to have stood – in Mecca! The Kaaba is a foursquare building inside the Great Mosque in Mecca – actually in the centre of the Mosque, and Moslems regard it as '*the navel of the World*' - whatever this expression that may mean. It should be pointed out that many years later the Great Mosque itself was built *over* the Kaaba, and this is why the Kaaba is *inside* the Mosque.

In the work of building the Kaaba, Ishmael is said to have been helped by Abraham and, as Abraham worked, he stood on a stone that served as a building-scaffold that rose and sank in the air as he built. The Moslems believe this really happened, because they show a stone, which, they claim, has the *imprint* of the foot of Abraham.

Furthermore, as they were building, Abraham and Ishmael were visited by the Angel Gabriel who brought with him another very special stone. Moslems believe that this particular stone was originally the Angel who had been ordered to keep watch over Adam and Eve in the Garden, but who was *turned into stone* by Allah, as a punishment for not being sufficiently watchful. This stone, which was built into the Eastern corner of the Kaaba, is made of basalt, a black volcanic rock, but Moslems believe that it was originally a brilliant white stone, but it became blackened by the kisses of the pilgrims who had made the pilgrimage to Mecca.

In fact, to kiss that stone is one of the most important reasons for going to Mecca. It is claimed that, on the Day of Judgment, the stone will turn back into the Angel, and the Angel will testify on behalf of those who have kept the faith. Every year millions of devout Moslems make the pilgrimage and no doubt you will have seen the impressive TV pictures of the vast crowds, all of whom move in the same direction around the Mosque. They do this seven times, because the Angels in Heaven are said to do this, and because Ishmael, the father of the tribes is also said to have done it. Then, they kiss the Black Stone and their pilgrimage is complete.

## Conversion to Islam

Islam, like Christianity, is an evangelical religion; that is, it actively seeks to make converts. One does not need to know a great deal about the faith in order to become a Moslem. Initially, very little understanding is needed, and what is regarded as essential and imperative is really very simple. A prospective convert is required, once in his lifetime, to say with conviction; "*God is great. There is one God, Allah, and Mohammed is his Prophet*", and this statement is considered sufficient to make him



a Moslem.

There are then certain duties to be followed that will make the person a *good* Moslem.

1. Once in a lifetime the pilgrimage to Mecca must be made.
2. Prayer must be offered three times a day, facing Mecca.
3. There must be fasting from sunrise to sunset during the three principal periods of annual fasting. What is done *after* sunset and *before* sunrise is a person's own business.
4. There must be benevolence. This means that 1/40th of income must be given. If these things are done, a person will be a good Moslem.

## Family History

The family from which Mohammed came was responsible for guarding these sacred places in Mecca and this was considered a position of great honour and privilege. His father, Abdallah, was said to possess all the virtues and qualities that a Moslem woman wishes to find in a man, and it is claimed that the night he married Amina, 200 maidens in Mecca died of a broken heart!

Mohammed was the only child of that marriage, but we are assured that all kinds of wonderful things happened when he was born.

1. His mother experienced no discomfort or pain whatsoever at his birth.
2. The country was bathed in a brilliant heavenly light.
3. The River Tigris burst its banks and overflowed into neighbouring lands.
4. Lake Sawa drained back to its original secret spring.
5. The palace of the King of Persia was shaken to its foundations and some of its towers fell to the ground.
6. The so-called 'sacred flame of the Zoroastrians', kept by the wise men, was extinguished.
7. Evil spirits, who they claim inhabit the stars and the signs of the zodiac, were cast out by good angels, along with Lucifer their leader, and thrown into the depths of the sea.
8. And the newly born child opened his eyes, looked up to heaven and cried aloud, "*God is great. There is no god but God, and I am his Prophet.*"

Later, they say, when Mohammed was just three years old, he was playing in a field with his foster-brother when two angels came and laid him on the ground. Gabriel, who was one of the two angels, opened up the boy's chest and took out his heart and cleansed it, wringing out the '*black drops of original sin*', which, Moslem teachers believe, even the best of humans inherit from Adam. Gabriel then filled the heart of Mohammed with faith, knowledge and prophetic inspiration, and put it back again, and from that time his face was lit up with the same mysterious light that had been seen in the patriarchs, from Adam down to Isaac and Ishmael. We are told that, after thousands of years, that sacred light was seen on the face of Mohammed.

His mother eventually decided to visit her relatives in Medina, but she died on the way and Mohammed was taken into care by his uncle, who had become the guardian

of the Kaaba. This uncle was also a wealthy merchant and he took the young Mohammed with him on his travels. It was in the course of these journeys, that, from the Nestorians, the young man learned about the Jewish and Christian scriptures. The Nestorians were followers of Nestorius of Constantinople who lived about 450 A.D., and who taught that in Christ there were *two* persons – one human and one divine.

Because he did not accept that Jesus was both human and divine *at the same time*, he was excommunicated and settled with his followers in Syria. This is where Mohammed came into contact with his followers. Mohammed returned to Mecca with his mind full of the strange things he had heard during his travels and out of them he formed what was to become the Islamic Faith. To the versions of the stories from the Old and New Testament scriptures were added numerous superstitious Arabian tales and legends. Historians acknowledge that, like millions of his followers, Mohammed, was not taught to read or write. Consequently, he was just as open to superstitious beliefs as the rest of his original followers.

## Christianity and Islam

As already stated, the two faiths are evangelistic in that they both proclaim a message and seek to gain converts, and with the two major 'articles of faith' of Islam, Christians would have no argument. '*Allah Akbar*', which literally means '*God is great!*', and, '*Islam*', which means '*Submission*'.

However, one of the major differences between the Islamic and Christian faiths has to do with the way in which converts are gained. Islam has historically shown itself prepared to resort to force to achieve its aims.

For instance, some 1400 years ago, when its armies over-ran countries which, at that time were at least *nominally* Christian, those whom they defeated were offered three choices.

- 1st. Submission – (i.e. conversion to Islam).
- 2nd. Slavery.
- 3rd. Death.

Although it is usually claimed that the Koran forbids killing, it was argued that if a captive refused the first two options he was *personally responsible* for his own death.

In contrast, Christianity preaches a gospel of Love and seeks to win the hearts of men by means of a message that tells of a Christ who was willing to die for all mankind, regardless of their nationality or colour or language.

What is gained by Violence, sooner or late is inevitably lost.  
What is truly won by Love can never be lost.

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# Foundations of the Faith

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

## THE ATONEMENT AND RECONCILIATION

Our greatest need is the need for a Saviour. Sin has caused a separation between God and us and if our relationship with God is to be restored our problem of sin has to be dealt with. God sent His Son, Jesus, to be our Saviour and the work He accomplished is what we call "the atonement." The effect of this work of atonement is "reconciliation" or the restoration of a peaceful relationship with God.

### **DEFINITION**

In the Old Testament the word "atonement" means 'to cover' or 'to shelter.' The word is used frequently in the Book of Leviticus in connection with the sacrifices offered under the old law. Through these sacrifices sins were covered.

In the Authorised Version of the New Testament the word "atonement" is found only once, in **Romans 5:11**, where Paul says that through Jesus Christ "**we have now received atonement.**" In more recent versions the word is translated "reconciliation", which it is suggested is a better translation of the Greek word used here by Paul. In the New International Version the words "**atonement**" and "**atoning sacrifice**" are used in the following places: **Hebrews 9:5** speaks of "**the atonement cover**" in reference to the mercy seat that covered the ark of the covenant; **Romans 3:25** says of Christ that "**God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement**"; and **1 John 2:2** and **4:10** speak of Jesus as "**the atoning sacrifice for our sins.**" The Authorised Version uses the word "**propitiation**" whilst the Revised Standard Version uses the word "**expiation**" in **Romans 3:25; 1 John 2:2** and **4:10**.

### **THE NEED FOR ATONEMENT**

Our relationship with God is broken when we sin. Sin causes a separation between man and God resulting in a state of hostility (**Isaiah 59:2**). Since God is a holy God who cannot look upon sin (**Habakkuk 1:13**) His displeasure with us is expressed through His wrath. For us, the consequence of our sin is death and ultimately permanent separation from God (**Romans 6:23; 2 Thessalonians 1:8-10**). To avoid this happening, atonement is needed to deal with our problem of sin so that we can come back into a right relationship with God. God is under no obligation to make this provision for us, but His love for us caused Him to do what was needed for our sins to be atoned for and for reconciliation to occur.

### **ATONEMENT IN THE OLD TESTAMENT**

Under the Old Testament law God graciously determined that atonement for sin would be made through the blood of animals offered in sacrifice for sins. **Leviticus 17:11** states, "**For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it for you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement by reason of the life.**" God's provision for the forgiveness of sins under the Old Law is perhaps best demonstrated in the events that took place on the annual Day of Atonement (see **Leviticus 16**). On that day the high priest made atonement for his own sins by offering a bull as a sin offering and sprinkling

some of its blood on the mercy seat in the Holy of Holies. Then two male goats were taken for the people of Israel. One goat was chosen for a sin offering. The blood of this goat was also taken into the Holy of Holies and sprinkled upon the mercy seat. The high priest then laid his hands on the head of the second goat, confessing the sins of the people as he did so. This goat, the scapegoat, was then released into the wilderness, symbolically bearing upon itself the sins of the people. It was only in anticipation of the greater work of Christ that God graciously allowed these animal sacrifices to provide for the atonement of sins committed under the old covenant.

### **ATONEMENT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT**

The animal sacrifices offered under the Old Law foreshadowed the work of Christ and could not of themselves provide for atonement (**Hebrews 9:15;10:1-4**). Out of love for us God decided to save us from our sins and the only way for Him to do this was through the death of His Son. It required the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ for God's sense of justice to be satisfied, for His wrath towards sin to be averted, and for forgiveness to be made available.

The New Testament views Christ's death as a sacrifice for sins. In **Romans 4:25** Paul writes that Christ "**was put to death for our trespasses.**" John the Baptist used the picture of sacrifice when he described Jesus as "**the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world**" (**John 1:29**). Jesus also spoke of his death in terms of sacrifice. In the upper room he took bread and said, "**Take, eat, this is my body.**" And of the cup he said, "**this is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins**" (**Matthew 26:26-27**). In death Christ is viewed as our representative and substitute. He died for us. Paul writes, "**we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died**" (**2 Corinthians 5:14**). Christ's death counts as the death of those he represents; his death is accepted as a substitute for our own death. Death is the penalty for sin, and in dying Christ paid the penalty that we should have paid. Peter writes, "**He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed**" (**1 Peter 2:24**).

In the death of Jesus upon the cross we see God's justice and God's love. At the cross the justice of God is satisfied as Christ pays the penalty and accepts the punishment for sin. And at the cross the love of God is expressed as Jesus dies for us to receive forgiveness and come into a right relationship with God.

### **THE EFFECT OF THE ATONEMENT**

Since the atonement deals with our problem of sin, the barrier separating us from God is removed and through our faith in Christ's work of atonement we can be reconciled to God. Christ has made peace for us and reconciled us to God through his death on the cross (**Ephesians 2:13-16; Colossians 1:20-21**). Paul speaks of the reconciling effect of Christ's death in **2 Corinthians 5:18-19**, where he tells us that "**in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.**"

### **CONCLUSION**

With regard to our need for forgiveness, the atonement is the most important teaching in the Bible. Our response to what God has done for us through the cross is to be one of faith (**Romans 3:22-26**). The consequence of this is that we are saved from our sins and reconciled to God in a right relationship. In this new relationship the cross then has a powerful influence upon the way that we live our lives (**Galatians 2:20; 6:14; Ephesians 5:1-2**).

Then the Lord opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the Lord standing in the way, with his drawn sword in his hand;

# Balaam's Ways (4)

(Brian J Boland)

In Numbers 22.3 we read that Moab was in dread of Israel, so Balak their King, sent messengers to Balaam to come and curse Israel. On arrival at Balaam's house he invites them to stay the night whilst he seeks advice from the Lord (verse 8). But God confronts Balaam with "**Who are these men WITH (im) you?**" (ESV [Numbers 22:9]). He exposes Balaam's prejudging his relationship with his guests. In Hebrew there

are several words used that can be translated "with". Here the word used is 'im'. It is the word used in Immanu-el "with us -God". (Isaiah 7:14) It implies a close bond with shared objectives (as God with Jacob in Genesis 35.3). It is the word used in Genesis 24:58 by Abraham's servant who had been sent to find a wife for his masters' son Isaac. On finding Rebekah, her family ask her "**will you go WITH (Hebrew- im) this man? She said, "I will go".** Also it is used in verse 22:12 "**You shall not go WITH (im) them**" (ESV).

But when in 22.20 God tells Balaam that "**If the men have come to call you, rise, go WITH (item) them; but only do what I tell you**", the word 'item' used here is different. When Shechem assaulted Dinah, his father went to talk WITH (item) the sons of Jacob. (Genesis 34.8) obviously no rapport here, just a meeting to discuss matters. That is what God told Balaam he could do IF the men came to call him. But what do we find Balaam doing? "**So Balaam rose in the morning and saddled his donkey and went with [im]...**" Numbers 22.21 ESV. No waiting for "the men ... to call you". He was up and rearing to be off! Not only did he not go WITH them as defined by God as "item" (as a detached party) but went WITH (im) them - precisely what God said he should not do. No wonder that Gods anger was kindled! Moses was banned from entering the promised land for a similarly small but extremely important variation in what God had told him to do, "**Take the staff, and assemble the congregation, you and Aaron your brother, and tell the rock before their eyes to yield its water. So you shall bring water out of the rock.**" )Numbers 20:8 ESV) But Moses brought drama into the event by lifting up his hand and struck the stone with his staff twice. (Numbers 20.10-11 ESV)

The OT worshippers were promised in Psalm 23.4, "**Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for you are with (im) me**"(ESV). The relationship of Christ with his followers today is on a completely different level. Christians are IN Christ, "**he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells IN you.**" (Romans 8.11 ESV). But the relationship is closer still as Jesus says in John 15.5, "**Whoever abides IN me AND I IN him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.**" (ESV) We do not have a 'with' relationship today with Jesus as Rebekah had with Abraham's' servant. But a husband-wife relationship, which Paul says, is the relationship between Christ and his church (Ephesians 5.12). The disciples' first encounter with the risen Lord as he walked WITH them (Luke 24.15) was that their hearts burnt WITHIN them. [Luke 24.32] The promise we now have is: "**whoever keeps his word, IN him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may be sure that we are IN him. (1 John 2:5)** The verse before warns us, as we shall see [DV] in the next article of following in Balaam ways, "**Whoever says, "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him"**



## What do you think?

In January's edition we posed a number of questions about whether God exercises direct control over our lives and sets us 'tests'. The following are edited extracts from a response from **Christopher Corrigan** from Dublin. Christopher references several passages of scripture, a sample of which are included below.

.....

The control that God exercises in our lives is contained primarily in the Covenant Code and is for our good on this earth and, ultimately, in the new heavens and new earth wherein dwells righteousness. (Rev 2:10) Christians are to hunger and thirst after righteousness. (Matt 5:6) I understand that the verbs 'hunger' and 'thirst' are written in the accusative case and, as such, denote a striving for **full and total** righteousness. Jesus Christ is the author and perfecter of our faith, our pioneer, the one we are to follow and to whom we are to look for our great example. (Heb 12:1,2) He has also promised us the aid and support of the Holy Spirit as we strive for righteousness, workmanship that is pleasing to God and acceptable service.

God, too, sets us trials and tests to prepare us for His presence. (James 1:2) Isaiah tells us that Christ was a "tried stone". (Is. 28:16-18) Peter also reminds us that Christians are "lively stones", part of the household of God. We are, in the words of Paul, to grow up into a holy temple of the Lord.

Remember that God is our Father and always desires what is best and good for us. He made us and put His moral law within us. (John 14:23) Our Father wants us to strive and struggle to be in His presence. If God saw fit to perfect His own Son through sufferings (Heb 2:10) – you can be sure that his adopted children will also be tested in the crucible of suffering.

None of us is alone on the path of holiness. Our Father has promised to hold our hand. We are to please God and remind the world of righteousness, which is a demonstration of the Christians true identity. We are called to consider our covenant with God and respect it. (Malachi 3:16) God cares deeply for each of us and wants us to be concerned for the things that matter **to him** in the reciprocal relationship that we enjoy with Him.

.....

## What do you think?

I haven't yet decided whether to see the much talked about film, "**The Passion of Christ**". I understand that the emphasis is very much on an intense, some say gratuitous, focus on the physical suffering of the Saviour to the virtual exclusion of any other facet. There is no doubt at all that Christ's physical suffering was a compelling element of His humiliating trial and crucifixion. But where does **your** emphasis lie when you consider the death of Christ and why does that aspect have particular significance for you? Or, if you have seen the film, what is your reaction and would you recommend other Christians to see it? Do you naturally incline towards reflection on:

- His physical suffering
- His obedience to the will of the Father
- His role as sin-bearer
- The triumph of the resurrection.
- None or all of these.

Responses please by Friday 21st May 2004, of 550 words or less. Please see January issue for details of how this feature is conducted.

## **News and Information**

### ***Ghana Appeal***

The Ghana Appeal started in 1989 and its success has been outstanding. The eighty congregations we have now are eight times the number there then and the medical aid has saved many people from physical death as well. We thank all who have donated towards this - without your donations this could not have happened. Our Ghanaian brethren are zealous in their service to the Lord and would by themselves have evangelised. Your donations have enabled them to do this far more effectively as can be seen from the results. God has granted the increase.

One consequence of this growth is that resources have to be spread more thinly and so we now have to curtail some of the work we attended to previously. That is sad because the potential is great, so we again appeal to you to continue your funding of this work for the Lord. With the completion of the roof another meeting place has been completed but this is one aspect of the work we now have to curtail. We have just heard of another two operations and these will be paid on receipt of the hospital bills. We continually hear of baptisms and also of deaths - a recently baptized schoolboy has just joined the number of orphans as his parents were killed in a lorry accident.

Men regularly go to other areas to teach infant churches and we pay their travelling expenses as needed - it's encouraging to see the photographs. We are providing a bicycle for this and also a megaphone to help the gospel be heard more extensively. With such growth there is continual need for benches but more especially for bibles, study material and hymn books. Thank you brethren for all

you have done.

Those wishing to help please make cheques payable to:

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

## **Obituary Sir Janette Hamilton**

### **Sister Janette Hamilton, Motherwell**

The congregation has lost a revered sister in Janette Hamilton, who passed away on the 11th of April 2004 after a long illness. Sister Hamilton was baptised in 1964 and thereafter remained a true, loving and faithful disciple.

Laterally, she was unable to worship with the saints, but, although absent in body, was never absent from our hearts. Janette had been a teacher of French and German and her career included spells in Dalziel High School, Motherwell, which she herself had once attended as a pupil. She was well known in the town and much respected. The funeral, conducted by brother Ian Davidson, took place at the meeting house and nearby Airbles cemetery. Many family and friends, including Cleland hospital nursing staff, gathered to pay their respects.

The congregation extends sincere condolences to her husband, brother Ronald Hamilton, and her two children Ruth and David. We thank God for her life and her faithfulness. She was greatly loved and will be greatly missed. We are all uplifted in the knowledge that she is now at rest in Jesus.

**William Purcell, Secretary**

## Obituary Bro Graham Gorton

### Brother Graham A. Gorton, Stretford

The church in Stretford, Manchester, regrets to announce that our brother Graham Gorton died suddenly on Friday the 16th April 2004.

He had been a member of the Church for over 50 years and was well known not only in this area but throughout the whole country. He started his Christian life at Hindley near Wigan and served the church ably in various congregations as he moved around the area eventually ending up in Stretford.

His encouragement, practical common sense and thought provoking approach to the scriptures will be missed by many, especially so here in Stretford.

Following a private cremation, a thanksgiving service was held at Longshoot, Wigan, conducted by brother Andrew Marsden.

We are thankful for having benefited from his Christ-like life and rejoice that he has gone to be with the Lord. Our prayers and thoughts are with our sister Mary and her family.

## 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**

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### Newtongrange, Scotland

Saturday, October 9th, 2004

#### ANNUAL SOCIAL

Speaker to be confirmed.

Meeting will start at 1.00 pm

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Foster L. Ramsey

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