

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 **Becoming like Christ is the issue**

The latest race for the Presidency of the United States of America was decided in favour of the incumbent, George W Bush, on November 2nd. I followed the election with some interest not simply because the American people were in the process of electing the person who undoubtedly is the most 'powerful' man (in this case) on the earth, but also because this was the election above all others that I can remember where the influence on the result of what was

commonly called the 'Evangelical Christian' voting block was so widely discussed.

I don't pretend to have any deep knowledge of the dynamics of the political processes in the USA except for what has been read in our newspapers and through television reports, and, in the present world climate, I suspect that we in the UK are fed (by our own press) a somewhat limited and dare I say biased view of the debates that will have taken place over many months of the campaign in the States. In that respect we are in the hands of the media and I have little faith in their ability or desire to offer an impartial and balanced view of matters.

Politics and 'Issues'

There was common consent that the voting block known as the 'Evangelical Christians' would be staunchly Republican and therefore behind George Bush. I'm sure that the term Evangelical Christians covers a broad spectrum of the Christian community in the USA but I would be surprised if many of our Church of Christ brethren in the States were not included within that categorisation. I am aware that we have readers in the USA, and that the implication of the above is that many Church of Christ brethren will have voted for George Bush as President. I should perhaps point out to overseas readers that Mr. Bush, predominantly because of the Iraq war, generally has a bad press in the UK but I want to stress

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that my intention is certainly not to register approval, disapproval or any other view of the way that Christians in the USA may have voted.

In fact what became very apparent as an onlooker, particularly because of the overtly Christian context in which some of the policies were presented, was the considerable difficulty that Christians have in this complex world in exercising their democratic franchise (at least in countries where that right is available). It's easy to see why many Christians would be attracted to Mr. Bush's policies, particularly the anti-abortion, anti-gay marriage, anti stem-cell research and 'family value' policies that he put forward. I can't remember the exact wording on some of the placards but the idea was 'At last a Christian promoting Christian values'. Where it begins to get more complicated is when the policies over the war in Iraq, environmental issues (a valid area for Christian thought?) and the alleged preference and favour towards 'big business' are taken into account.

For Christians, any attempt to define ourselves by a political 'credo' is doomed to failure. We can no doubt find issues or policies in each of the political parties that we could support, but are very unlikely to find any one political party with policies that we could support across the board. If we do vote, the likelihood is that we make some compromises and cast our vote for the party that best broadly represents our views or take an issue-based judgement and vote for the party that takes the appropriate stance on issues that are most important to us. For others, it may not be a policy matter at all but more a decision based on the personality of the political leader. One thought that has been expressed on a number of occasions is how unlikely it is that a professing Christian (and both President Bush and our own Prime Minister, Mr Blair would claim that) could successfully hold the very highest political office in this hugely complex world without having to compromise what we would consider fundamental Christian beliefs along the way.

Faith is the issue

However it was the issue-based politics that captured my attention. I said earlier that Christians could not define themselves by 'issues' in the political field. It is, I believe, equally difficult for Christians to define themselves by issues in the 'religious' field. It has been said that the Church will only be able to claim unity when every Christian believes the same thing on every issue and passages such as 1 Cor 1:10 will be quoted to support that contention. There, in response to the fact that the community was beginning to split into defined groupings (those of Cephas, Apollos, Paul etc), Paul expressed the wish to the Corinthians, **"that you all agree and that there be no dissensions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgement."** To conclude that Paul envisaged some Utopian state where all Christians of all cultures, at all stages of maturity, at all degrees of scholarship and at all times should agree with each other on every issue is pushing the boundaries of credibility too far, and I don't think that's what Paul meant. Paul was condemning the cult of personality and factionalism that was emerging within the still immature Christian community in Corinth and reminded them that he had previously had to address them as "babes in Christ". In relation to the various 'parties' that had arisen he states, **"For no other foundation can any one lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ."** (1 Cor 3:11) The primacy of the Christ is re-enforced when he concludes, **"So let no-one boast of men. For all things are yours, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future, all are yours: and you are Christ's and Christ is God's."** (3:21-23)

It's not uncommon when we are discussing spiritual matters with other people to be asked the question, "So what does your Church teach/believe in?" Invariably we then become drawn into describing our beliefs and that is done by reference to 'issues' – no earthly headquarters, no music in worship, mutual ministry, adult immersion etc. etc. In reality the answer to the 'what do you believe in' question is far simpler than that and the answer is "the Christ". Jesus the Christ is our ultimate reference point because that's what we are – Christians, followers or disciples of the Christ of God. The problem of course is that the above answer does not distinctively set us apart from any other group of people who would claim the same allegiance and it's at that point that we feel compelled to refer to issues that do define us and make us distinctive from other groups. However we can only ever be adequately and absolutely defined by the One who has brought salvation to mankind, that is, "Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith". We must be a people of God who are unashamedly driven by Christ and look to the life, example and teaching of Jesus himself as the cornerstone of our faith.

Conforming to Christ

When Paul wrote to the Church in Philippi he produced what many regard as the most powerful summary of his personal faith. **"I count everything as loss for the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, based on law, but which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith; that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead."** (Phil. 3:8-11) That desire for a deep-rooted and unshakeable faith in Christ is surely at the heart of our Christian experience.

In our quest to understand the requirements and demands of our Lord and Saviour more perfectly we each undertake a personal journey and during that journey we explore the Scriptures, we draw on the wisdom, learning, experience and protection of our mature brethren in the faith, we are shaped by our own experiences and, with our eyes fixed on Jesus, our relationship with Him grows until we attain 'the fullness of Christ'. There are some wonderfully evocative terms that are used to describe this process of sanctification in the New Testament. To the Church in Corinth Paul writes that **"when a man turns to the Lord"**, and with the help of the Spirit, **"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. 3:16-18) To Galatia, in some despair at their apparent lack of spiritual progress, Paul writes, **"I am in travail until Christ be formed in you."** And to the Church in Colossae, Paul urges his readers, **"As therefore you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so live in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving."** (Col. 2:6,7)

Do we have the confidence in this troubled and sceptical world to define ourselves by our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and his teachings? Undoubtedly during the course of our spiritual journey we will be confronted with, and be required to defend that faith and our adherence to Christ's teachings, but far better that we deal with the issues that arise based on a rock-solid faith in Jesus and his teachings, than that we attempt to define Jesus, and our faith, by reference to the issues that the world confronts us with.

Word Study

THE EARNEST OF THE SPIRIT

(Ian S. Davidson, Motherwell)

We read: **"Now He who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, is God; who also has sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts."** (2 Corinthians 1:21,22). **"Now He who has wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also has given unto us the earnest of the Spirit."** (2 Corinthians 5:5) **"In whom you also trusted, after that you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that you believed, you were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, who is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of His glory."** (Ephesians 1: 13,14).

The word "earnest" is a translation of the Greek word *arrabon*, which originally referred to earnest-money deposited by the purchaser and forfeited if the purchase was not completed. It was probably introduced into Greece from Phoenicia. 'In general usage it came to denote a pledge or earnest of any sort.' (W.E.Vine). A.M.Hunter, for example, has written: "From the Hebrew *erabon* we can trace it through the Latin *arra* to the Scots 'arles' (the 'arles penny' was the advance payment you made when you were hiring a servant). Always the basic meaning of the word is a foretaste, a first instalment and pledge that what is to follow will be of the same quality. (In modern Greek *arrabona* is an 'engagement ring'). Turn up the Greek papyrus letters, written about the time of Christ, which our archaeologists have been exhuming from the sands of ancient Egypt, and you will find it used there. Thus a man writes to a friend, 'I paid Lampon the mouse-catcher for you the sum of eight drachmae as earnest-money in order that he may catch the mice while they are with young'".

The Apostle Paul connected *arrabon* with the Holy Spirit. To him, the Holy Spirit was an instalment, a guarantee, a foretaste of the life to come – a life to be lived in the presence of God Himself. "The gift of the Holy Spirit is therefore a foretaste of the fulness of life which the Christian will one day live in the presence of God, a foretaste of the very life of God Himself, and a pledge and a guarantee that some day God will fulfil His promise and enable the Christian to enter into that life. He who is in the Spirit has, therefore, in Him the very life of God." (Barclay). Truly, the Holy Spirit is something "quite out of this world". His presence proves there is another world beyond this scene of time.

THE HOLY SPIRIT – A WHO OR WHAT?

But who or what is the Holy Spirit? I see Him as a personality of the Godhead or Godhood (Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14). Jehovah's Witnesses describe the Spirit as God's "active force". They do not see Him as a personality at all. I believe they are wrong on this. The Holy Spirit is not some kind of force or a mental concept. The Spirit is not a state of mind; He is a being with a mind. He can hear, speak, guide, teach, reprove, reveal, make intercession, etc. He can also be grieved (Ephesians 4:30). I suggest that these are all attributes of a living person. I also believe that the Spirit sustains the same relationship to God as the human spirit does to man. Only the inner man is aware of the thoughts, intents and purposes of man.

Likewise, no one outside knows or comprehends the thoughts of the infinite, except the Spirit of God. Martin Luther once wrote: "*Pneuma* (spirit) is the highest and noblest part of man, which qualifies him to lay hold of the incomprehensible, invisible, eternal things; in short, it is the house where faith and God's word are at home."

ALL IN NEED OF THE SPIRIT

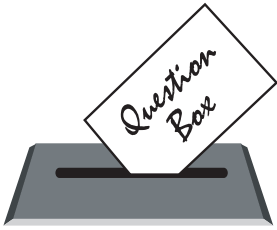
Without the Spirit of God, we are not going to make it to the heavenly shore. We need Him every step of the way, every minute of the day. His presence is truly vital. Paul wrote to the Romans: "**Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, He is none of His.**" (8:9b). One writer has said: "The Spirit lives in us, abides with us, shares with us as a friend, a help, a comforter and a counsellor. The trusting heart which accepts this as a fact, will be blessed." Jesus, of course, described Him as "the Comforter". (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7). The Greek word is *Parakletos* and refers to one who pleads another's cause, an intercessor, an advocate. In the widest sense, the word signifies a succourer and a comforter. This title reveals much of what the Holy Spirit does for the believer in his walk and talk for Jesus. In fact, Jesus described the Spirit as "another Comforter". (John 14:16) There are two Greek words for "another". They are *allos* and *heteros*. The former speaks of another of the same sort and the latter, another of a different sort. Not surprisingly, *allos* is the adjective that is found in John 14. So Jesus requested the Father to send another Helper like Himself, who could encourage, strengthen and support the saints during the age when He was absent.

THE SPIRIT UNDER THE OLD COVENANT

The "earnest of the Spirit" is a phrase that is not found in the Old Testament Scriptures. The question is often asked: "Was the Holy Spirit given under the Old Covenant?" My answer is: "The Spirit was bestowed upon certain select individuals under the Old Covenant, but not upon the community as a whole". Let me name some of those individuals: Joseph (Genesis 41:38); Bezaleel (Exodus 31:3); Moses and the seventy (Numbers 11:25); Joshua (Numbers 27:18); Othniel (Judges 3:10); Gideon (Judges 6:34); Jephthah (Judges 11:29); Saul (1 Samuel 10:10); Azariah (2 Chronicles 15:1); prophets (Nehemiah 9:30); Isaiah (48:16); Ezekiel (2:2; 11:5). Truly, the age of the Messiah is a greater age in every way.

FINAL THOUGHTS

There is only one Holy Spirit, but He functions in seven ways (Revelation 1:4; 3:1): in creation, revelation, incarnation, inspiration, confirmation, incorporation and transformation. He transforms our lives completely. He destroys the works of the flesh and produces in us the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5: 16-26). Paul also wrote: "**Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.**" (2 Corinthians 3: 17, 18). J.W. McGarvey has written: "However, none of the ministers of Christ, not even the apostles (ch.5:16), continually beheld Christ glorified as an objective reality, for it is only in our future state that we shall thus look upon Him, and that look will fully effect the transformation into His likeness which our knowledge of Him in the gospel has been slowly working out within us during our earthly life (John 17:24; 1 John 3:2; Col. 3: 3,4; Rom. 8:17; Phil. 3:12-14; Col. 1:27)."



The question I have been asked to consider this month has come from a brother in Ghana and was prompted by the answers I recently gave to questions on the subject of Baptism. Our brother refers us to the Lord's own baptism, and to the conversation with John the Baptist which preceded it. But before we examine what they said to each other, there are several other interesting facts that we should bear in mind.

1. *The Lord's Baptism was an Important Event in His Life.*

It was not something that He accepted casually. On the contrary, it was an act about which he had clearly given deep thought. How do we know this? We know this because he made a special journey in order to be baptised. Matthew 3:13 reveals that the Lord travelled 'from Galilee to Jordan' to John for a specific purpose; namely, 'to be baptised by him'.

This means that His baptism was an event that He obviously regarded as of deep significance. Indeed, it is not too much to say that His baptism was only equalled in its importance by His later Transfiguration.

Matthew reveals, that when Jesus took Peter, James and John 'apart' to the high mountain this, too, was a deliberate and purposeful act. He had chosen these three apostles to become the witnesses of a very special event, as He was 'transfigured before them'. (Matt. 17:2) They were meant to hear the Voice which said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him", and, as we know, this was the Voice which, at His baptism, had said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." (Matt.13: 17).

2. *The Climax of John's personal Ministry.*

The timing of the Lord's baptism was deliberate. Luke tells us that it was after 'all the people' had been baptized that Jesus came to John to be baptized. (Luke.3: 21)

John had come as the 'forerunner' of the Messiah, in fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy (Luk.1: 17). His task was 'to make ready a people prepared for the Lord', and the baptism of Jesus marked the culmination of John's own ministry, and he was able to say, - "...this joy of mine is now full. He must increase and I must decrease." (John 3:30)

3. *Its Special Message to John the Baptist.*

In a lesser sense, the baptism of Jesus also carried a more personal significance for John the Baptist because it was the manner in which *the identity of the Messiah* was revealed to him. John said, "I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, he on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptises with the Holy Spirit." (John 1; 33)

Jesus was not a stranger to John. He already knew Jesus as a relative because of the relationship that existed between their mothers, Elizabeth and Mary (Luk.1: 36), and he was aware of the sinless character of Jesus. How, otherwise, when Jesus asked to be baptized, could John have said, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" (Matt.3: 14)

This surely indicates prior acquaintance. My own view is that this, from John, was not so much a question as an exclamation of surprise – of amazement! - that one whom he knew to be so holy should request to be baptized by him. But, although John knew Jesus, he did not know Him *as the Messiah*, until the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus at His baptism.

And now we come to our question(s).

1. "What is meant by "to fulfil all righteousness?"
2. "Why was Jesus baptized?"



1. 'To fulfil all righteousness'

Although He lived as a Jew, faithful to the Mosaic law and all its requirements, Jesus was not baptized 'to fulfil the Law', because baptism was not commanded by the Law of Moses. When John issued the call his fellow-Jews to '*repent and be baptized*', his message was unique in Jewish history, and it was this new message that brought about the confrontation between Jesus and the chief priests and elders about which we read in Matt.21: 24ff. This passage tells us that Jesus challenged the religious leaders to say where John's baptism originated. Was it from heaven, or from men? But, of course, had there been prior provision in the Law of Moses for such a baptism as John's, the discussion would not even have taken place.

It was this very uniqueness of John's baptism that was the cause of the debate. The Jewish religious leaders did not accept John's baptism *because it was not a requirement imposed by the Mosaic Law* and, therefore, they refused to submit to it. They were probably contemptuous of those who were influenced by John, and regarded them as ignorant and foolish.

As for it being '*from God*', the religious leaders could not accept the baptism commanded by John as a new revelation from God, *because it had not come through themselves*. After all, they were the authorities that determined what was permissible in Judaism! They were the arbiters of true and false revelations! And, again, these priests, scribes and Pharisees would have argued that they, as '*children of Abraham*' and members of a nation that was in a covenant relationship with God, *did not need baptism*.



In Matt. 3:7-9, we find that this is precisely what John accused these men of saying. They believed in the ritual washing of both their persons and their possessions, as Mark explains in Mark 7:3-4, but they saw baptism as a rite intended only for non-Jews who wished to become proselytes of their religion. The strict rule was that any male Gentile who wished to embrace the Jewish faith must undergo first circumcision, then be baptized

and then offer sacrifice, whilst the law for a female declared that she must first be baptized and then offer sacrifice.

This is because the act of baptism was regarded as the means of cleansing from the old, 'heathen' life and its sins, and the beginning of a new life in the Jewish faith. The converts were then said to be received '*under the wings of the Divine Presence*' – the expression that was used to describe proselytism. These rules meant that no devout Jew would have considered himself as a subject for repentance and baptism '*for the remission of sins*', (Luk.3: 3). For this reason John's message fell on the ears

of the people as both utterly new and startling.

In the light of the discussion between Jesus and the Jews on the subject of John's baptism, we have to say that "*to fulfil all righteousness*", means '*to do everything commanded by God*', because the Lord made it clear that John's baptism was commanded by God.

2. "Why was Jesus baptised"

Not surprisingly, this question has occupied the minds of believers ever since the Church was established and a vast array of explanations have been put forward, yet it has remained a thorny issue and a puzzle.

i) Not to please His mother.

There is an ancient document known as '*The Gospel of the Nazarene*' - sometimes called '*The Gospel of the Hebrews*' - but never regarded by the early Christians as divinely inspired, that claims that Mary and His brothers said to Jesus, "*Behold, John Baptist baptizes to the remission of sins. Let us go and be baptized by him*". Jesus replied, "*How have I sinned that I should go and be baptized by him? Perchance this very thing, that I have said is ignorance*".

The story continues to claim that Jesus was compelled, unwillingly, by Mary to go to John to be baptized. Is it any wonder that the early Christians rejected a document, that held such unlikely tales?

ii) Not for the forgiveness of sin.

Unlike the multitudes who flocked to John from all quarters, confessing their sins, Jesus had no sins to confess.

iii) Baptized to mark the Commencement of His own Ministry.

As the ministry of John ended, the ministry of Jesus began. After recording the descent of the Spirit and the message of the heavenly Voice, Luke 3:23 reveals that *after* His baptism, at about thirty years of age, Jesus commenced His own public ministry.

As a boy, in the Temple in Jerusalem, Jesus had revealed that He was aware of having a mission to fulfil (Luke 2:47), and through many years had waited for the moment to arrive when His work should commence. The 'fore-runner' had come as promised by the scriptures, (Matt. 11:10), with a message which had disturbed, convicted and prepared the people for the coming of the longed-for Messiah. They were ready. And Jesus knew that His time had arrived.

When He asked John to baptize Him, John had protested. But Jesus had insisted. "Let it be so *now*". The '*now*' is emphatic. It means '*at this time*'. Therefore, the baptism of Jesus was both *an act of identification* with the repentant people whom He had come to save, and *an act of commitment* to the task the Father had laid on Him.

John records, "He came to His own - ('*idia*'; His own things. That which belonged to Him) and His own - ('*idioi*' = His own people) - 'they who belonged to Him' - did not receive Him. But to all who received Him, who believed in His name, He gave the power to become children of God." (John 1:11-12)

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WONDERFUL WOMANHOOD

JESUS WAS BAPTIZED - WHY?

(G. Sprake)

- Mtt 3 v. 13 - 17 Jesus was not baptized for the remission of sins but to 'fulfil all righteousness' and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting upon Him: And, lo, a voice from heaven saying "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."
- John 3 v 1 - 2 Nicodemus declared his belief that Jesus had come from God.
v 3 Jesus said, "You must be born again."
v 4 Nicodemus did not understand how a grown man could be born again.
v 5 Jesus told him "Except a man be born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter the kingdom of God" because
v 6 "That which is born of the flesh is flesh and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit".
- John 1 v 1 The Word who was in the beginning with God and Who was God was manifest in the flesh when He was born of Mary, thus
1 Timothy 3 v 16 becoming the one person of the Godhead until He was again
Acts 1 v 9 recieved up in glory.

WW Ed's note:

Sometimes, in the modern age of knowledge at your fingertips, it is good to be reminded of basic things. It is when we start to think deeply of WHY that we run into difficulties. This doesn't mean we have to take everything without questioning, but it does mean that we can accept God's presence with faith. Matthew 18:3 explains that we must become like children - trusting, loving and forgiving, and so it does no harm at all to "Tell me the old, old story". Thank you to G. Sprake for her time and thoughts. (Ann)

SOME THOUGHTS ON FAITH

God does not expect us to submit our faith to him without reason, but the very limits of our reason make faith a necessity. (Augustine)

Faith is not a distant view but a warm embrace of Christ (Calvin)

Faith is to believe what we do not see, and the reward of faith is to see what we believe (Augustine)

In April 1988 the evening news reported on a photographer who was a skydiver. He had jumped from a plane along with numerous other skydivers and filmed the group as they fell and opened their parachutes. On the film as the final skydiver opened his parachute, the picture went berserk. The announcer reported that the cameraman had fallen to his death, having jumped out of the plane without his parachute. It wasn't until he reached for the absent ripcord he realised that he was freefalling without a parachute. Until that point the jump probably seemed exciting and fun. But tragically he had acted with thoughtless haste and deadly foolishness. Nothing could save him, for his faith was in a parachute never buckled on. Faith in anything but an all-sufficient God can be just as tragic spiritually. Only with faith in Jesus Christ dare we step into the dangerous excitement of life. (Anon)

CONTENTMENT

Una Birch (Morley)

"I have learned to be satisfied with what I have. I know what it is to be in need and what it is to have more than enough. I have learned this secret so that anywhere at any time I am content, whether I am full or hungry, whether I have too much or too little. I have the strength to face all conditions by the power that Christ gives me." What an unambiguous and confident statement Paul makes.

When thinking of contentment I picture 'Life on the farm' and see cows lying in green pastures, jaws swinging from side to side, chewing cud. Or cats stretched out on knees, purring like diesel engines, and think, 'They haven't a care in the world'. Everything they need is provided for them, and they are content.



Wouldn't it be nice if we could emulate the satiation of these animals. Could we stand beside Paul and say with him, "Anywhere at any time, I am content?" Paul says he has learned the secret of contentment. Reading his letters we learn that he does not keep this secret to himself.

Notice the operative word, '**learned**'. I feel that he did not find it easy at first and it could be that this learning process is at work in Romans 7:14 – 25. Paul sums the dichotomy up in v25, "This then is my condition: on my own I can serve God's law only with my mind, while my human nature serves the law of sin. What an unhappy man I am."

Paul addresses fellow Christians but his writings are self-inclusive. Notice how he matures and encourages as he reveals the secret of his contentment:

Romans

1:16 I have complete confidence

6:22 I live a new life

8:25 I am patient and hopeful

15:1 I have a strong faith

5:1 I have peace with God

8:1 I live in union with Christ

8:37 I have complete victory

2 Corinthians

4:1 I am not discouraged

5:1 I have a house in heaven

Galatians

4:6 I am God's son

5:1 I have been set free

Ephesians

1:3 I am blessed with every spiritual blessing

Phillipians

2:1 I have fellowship with the Spirit

Often in our discontentment, we wish beyond ourselves for the things that we want but don't really need. World Cruises. Personalised number plates! Designer clothes. 6m Digital camera. Money to 'shop till I drop'. Holiday homes. Desirable Assets!

I ask. Can the Christian just sit back and chew the cud, without a care in the world? What do you think? I think we should be able to. Or at least practise the art. Jesus said, "**Do not be anxious**" and "**Do not worry**". He didn't say expect everything to be handed to you on a plate! Of course we have to be concerned. Providing for our humanity needs our attention and has to be worked at...!

Doesn't the caring farmer provide for his cows? The owner for the cat? YES! And our Loving Father provides for us!

"The Lord is my Shepherd. He leads me into restful pastures, I settle down, without worrying. My soul is recharged. He guides my steps. Comforts me when I am ill. My table creaks with the weight of His love. He anoints me and I feel special. My cup spills over. Goodness and mercy is my portion."

Ah! My Spiritual Assets! A home in the House of the Lord forever. Now that is contentment.

Practical Christianity

THE ROAD TO RECOVERY

LESSON 5

(David Yasko, USA)

Now, we all have hurts we will never forget. We all have habits that are messing up our lives. Today we are on step five and I call it the transformation step. It's the V in recovery.

VOLUNTARILY SUBMIT TO EVERY CHANGE GOD WANTS TO MAKE IN MY LIFE AND HUMBLY ASK HIM TO REMOVE MY CHARACTER DEFECTS. Let's read Romans 12:1-2

"Offer yourselves as a living sacrifice to God, dedicated to his service and pleasing to him ... and let God transform you inwardly by a complete change of your mind." (GN) The keys in that verse involve the words "transform" and "change of your mind." The only way we can be transformed is to have a change of mind. Today, in talking about this step I want to answer three questions. "Where do our character defects come from?" "Why is it so hard to change them?" And, "How do I cooperate with God's change process?" so our hurts, habits and hang-ups will stop messing up our lives.

QUESTION 1: WHERE DO MY CHARACTER DEFECTS COME FROM? Because we are complex, our character defects come from three sources. There is a biological source, there is a sociological source and there's a theological source:

A. MY CHROMOSOMES.

We inherited some of them. Your mother and father each contributed 23,000 chromosomes to you. So we inherited some of their weaknesses. We each inherited some physical flaws and some emotional flaws from our parents. Genetics explain something called our "predisposition's" to sin, but genetics doesn't excuse us from sin. You may have inherited your father's short fuse but that doesn't give you the right to go out and murder somebody. You may have inherited your tendency to be lazy but that doesn't excuse you from doing something good with your life. You may have inherited your tendency towards certain addictions, but that isn't an excuse to go out and give in to that addiction.

B. MY CIRCUMSTANCES.

We were all raised a certain way. Most of us learned our habits from our parents and our friends. We learned how to get certain needs met and we've learned how to handle rejection. A lot of our defects are just attempts to fill unmet needs. Let me give an example. Each of us has a need for respect. If you didn't get any respect growing up chances are you settled for attention. And attention is attention, good or bad. You have a need for security and when we don't get that we tend to cover it up with materialism. Our circumstances come from an attempt to fill unmet needs.

C. MY CHOICES.

If we choose to do something long enough, it becomes a habit. When it becomes a habit, we're stuck with it. And stuff we never wanted in our lives becomes all too real because we chose to develop a bad habit. Our character defects are often positive qualities that are being misused.

QUESTION 2: WHY IS IT SO HARD TO CHANGE THEM? Why is it so hard to lose this stuff. We've tried fads, and therapies. We've read books and gone to seminars. And it hasn't helped. Why is it so hard to change? Three or four reasons:

A. BECAUSE I'VE HAD THEM SO LONG.

We didn't get like this overnight. It took me years to get this neurotic. We're not going to shake it in an hour and a half. Many of our habits have been with us since childhood, and they may not be comfortable and they may be self-defeating, but at least they're familiar. So we excuse them. We say, "Hey, love me or leave me, but that's just the way I am." We've had them so long it's just hard to get rid of them.

B. BECAUSE I IDENTIFY WITH THEM.

We confuse our identity with our defects. We say, "that's just the way I am", but we don't have to be like this. We can change. "That's just the way I am" shows we are finding our identity through our defects. In your mind, complete this sentence. "It's just like me to be..." a workaholic, overweight, over anxious. It's just like me to let people run over me. When we make that the baseline for our life we are setting ourselves up to live by our defects and make every day a self-fulfilling prophecy. Here's why we do that. Deep down inside we are afraid that if we let go of this defect, you won't be you anymore. This is a part of me. I've always had a short fuse. I've always had a nervous stomach. If I let go of it, will I still be me?

C. BECAUSE EVERY DEFECT HAS A PAYOFF.

It may mask my pain. It may give me an excuse to fail. It may mask the guilt in my life. It may get me attention. It may allow me to control other people. Any time a negative behavior is repeated, self-destructive as it may be, there is always a payoff. And we don't want to let go of that payoff if there is any way possible. Mum says to the kids, "Get up or you'll be late for school." They don't get up. So she says again, "Get up, you're going to be late for school." They still don't get up. So she yells. "GET UP, NOW!" Here they come. We've set up our mothers to yell. She figures out, yelling works. That's the payoff. So be aware of the payoffs.

D. BECAUSE SATAN DISCOURAGES ME.

Satan is the father of negative thoughts. He is the accuser. He tells us, "that will never work. You can never change." Some of you may be thinking I really want to get rid of this habit. I want to stop hating that person. I'm tired of hurting from that past experience. I want to change." Then Satan starts on you. "Who do you think you are? You think *you're* going to change? Forget it. Maybe other people, but not you. Because when it comes to life, you're a loser, but that's OK, you're my loser." But the Bible tells us the truth sets us free. If the truth sets us free and Satan wants us imprisoned by our defects, guess who doesn't want us to know the truth? Satan doesn't, that's who. So, how do we get past Satan?

QUESTION 3: HOW DO I COOPERATE WITH GOD'S CHANGE PROCESS?
Romans 12:2, "...be transformed by the renewing of your mind." Our

thoughts are the autopilot of our life and so if we want to change the way we live, we've got to change the way we think about things. Our thoughts determine our feelings and our feelings determine our actions. When we decide "it's time for a change" we can change our course by sheer will power but sooner or later we're going to let go and if will power is the only thing steering us, we'll go right back to where we started, and we go off the diet, or start smoking again, or start getting mad at everything. So if we want to change we can't rely on will power alone, we've got to change our autopilot. What's our autopilot? "It's just like me to be..." That's our auto pilot. Now, I want to give you seven different ways to change your autopilot through re-focusing. That's seven different ways to change your mind so you can cooperate with God to change the things you could never change before.

1. FOCUS ON CHANGING ONE DEFECT AT A TIME.

Proverbs 17:24, "A discerning man keeps wisdom in view, but a fool's eyes wander to the ends of the earth." The enemy to change is the inability to focus. Ask God which defect he wants to work on first in our life. We have to be specific with what we need to work on. If you don't know what, go home and get your moral inventory you made and ask God to lead you to the one that is damaging you the most. Then resolve to work on that one issue. So focus on one defect at a time.

2. FOCUS ON VICTORY ONE DAY AT A TIME.

Matthew 6:11 "Give us today our daily bread." Why daily? Because God wants to give us enough strength to change for one day. God tells us over and over in his word to go through this life one day at a time. Does that mean we shouldn't make plans? No. We should make plans. It does mean we shouldn't take our plans for granted. That problem in your mind right now that's been a problem for a long time can only be dealt with on a daily basis. How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time. So ask God for patience, just for today. Or for pure thoughts, or positive speech. And you ask God for help just through the rest of the day, and take it a little bit at a time. *Matthew 6:34 "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."* Rome wasn't built in a day, character wasn't built in a day, character defects aren't removed in a day. We have to grow by days, one at a time. Then, at the end of the day, thank God for the victories, regardless of how small, that we won.

3. FOCUS ON GOD'S POWER, NOT WILLPOWER.

Willpower is just our power and if our power would've worked, we'd have already changed. But we haven't because we can't. We just don't have the power to do it. Focusing entirely on our willpower just blocks the recovery in our lives. We say, "I can work it out!" and it just stomps all over us because as hard as we work, we've still got the problem and we're tired to boot. Let me show you what I mean. Look at *Jeremiah 13:23 "Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil."* Our willpower won't change us. But *Philippians 4:13 "I can do everything through him who gives me strength."* So we pray, "Lord, I can't change on my own power, but I'm trusting you to take away this defect." And visualize God taking away the problem whether it's your temper or your language or whatever.

4. FOCUS ON WHAT I WANT, NOT WHAT I DON'T WANT.

This is the fourth way we change our mind so God can work in our lives. Look at

Philippians 4:8 **"Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable — if anything is excellent or praiseworthy — think about such things."** Focus on the good because what we focus on is what dominates our life. That's the difference in focusing on what we've been and focusing on what we can be. When we focus on what we can be, we find the avenue for change. When you're watching TV and you see a programme you don't like you don't sit there and say, "I'm not going to watch it", you change the channel.

We need to refocus away from what we've been and focus on what God wants us to be. That's the power of the promises of God. We need to retrain our minds to learn God's thoughts. When you feel like you can't accomplish anything quote *Philippians 4:13*. When we feel worthless quote *Romans 8:1* (There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.). Repeat God's promises as often as you can and one day our positive thoughts will outweigh our negative thoughts and we'll feel clean. That's called renewal. We are being made new every time we claim a promise of God.

5. FOCUS ON DOING GOOD, NOT FEELING GOOD.

Galatians 5:16 **"So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature."** If we do the right thing, the right feelings will eventually catch up with us. If we wait until we feel like changing before we change, the devil will make sure we never feel like changing. It's always easier to act your way into a feeling than it is to feel your way into an action. If you don't feel loving toward your wife, start acting loving and the feelings will come. AA tells us to "fake it 'til you make it." Do the right thing even when you don't feel like it and your feelings will catch up. Any time we try to make a major change in our lives it will feel bad. It'll feel awkward. Why? Because it won't feel normal. So don't quit. Eventually our feelings will catch up to our mind.

6. FOCUS ON PEOPLE WHO HELP ME, NOT HINDER ME.

The right kinds of people help us. The wrong kinds of people don't. The Bible says, "Bad company corrupts good morals." If you don't want to get stung, stay away from the bees. Stay away from the things that mess you up. On the other hand, *Ecclesiastes* tells us that a threefold cord is never broken. Because when one falls the other one is there to pick you up. This is important. We cannot recover alone. We must have strong recovery relationships. Recovery happens in the presence of people. *Proverbs 27:17*, **"As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another."** We need to be in healthy recovery relationships. All the willpower, therapy and seminar in the world can't help us if we try to heal by ourselves.

7. FOCUS ON PROGRESS, NOT PERFECTION.

Philippians 1:6, **"...be confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."** We need to get out of the thought process that tells us God will only love us when we get to a certain stage in our lives. That's wrong. God loves us at each stage of our recovery and growth. God can't love us any more than he does at this moment. So we don't have to waste another second on being perfect. Isn't that a relief? Perfection is out. Progress is in and God loves us each tiny little step we make. Keep on walking, my brothers and sisters, the best is yet to come.

News and Information

Ghana Appeal

Thank you brethren for your continued support of the Lord's work in Ghana. In this way you have helped our brethren there to be more effective in evangelizing and saved precious lives through medical assistance. Some time ago your donations helped an epileptic girl. We are happy to report that she is now married and expecting a baby. Her husband travels a considerable distance to expand the Church and needs assistance for travelling expenses and study materials for interested people. Other brothers who are using their time in this way are also in need of financial help to be more effective. This is an ongoing, continual need, but an important one.

We have also received a number of requests for help to buy land for meeting places, as well as for building. Such cases can however only be met when other priorities have been satisfied, although this would be a great advantage. The expense is considerably less in country areas. Because of successful evangelism and the ongoing establishment of new Churches this problem continues and we could quote new examples with each appeal.

Amongst serious medical cases requiring treatment are three ailing widows and a brother in urgent need of an operation. Without your help many of these people would not survive.

We understand the worry our brethren have over funeral expenses but unfortunately our resources are inadequate to help with this.

The co-operative business venture that your funding helped a group of sisters to start has proved to be successful and is continuing well. However we would only fund the start of one such enterprise after the existing one was operating successfully.

Those wishing to help please make cheques payable to: **Dennyloanhead Church of Christ Ghana Fund** and send to the treasurer:

**Mrs Janet McDonald,
12 Charles Drive, Larbert, Falkirk,
Stirlingshire. FK5 3HB.
Tel: 01324 562480**

Obituary Bro. John Peden

Tranent, Scotland.

It is with great sadness that the Church in Tranent reports the death of our Bro. John Peden on 31st October 2004. John was born on the 27th October 1915, was baptized into his Lord in 1950 and has been a faithful and active member until becoming unable to attend meetings these last few years through ill health.

John taught the Sunday School for some time and enjoyed his time with the children. He had some hobbies, music and photography among them, but as was said during the funeral service, the Church was his life. The passage in Psalms 84:10, read at the service, was one that John loved and he would be delighted to be a keeper at that door. Bro John Kneller ably conducted a moving service in the Church and at the graveside.

John Colgan,
Tranent.

ARE YOU A PREACHER?

A preacher is a herald of good news. His purpose is not to tickle the ears or impress the intellect, but to instruct simple people unto righteousness. He, or she, is the sower of Godly truths, a distributor of the great saving doctrine of God through Christ. The task is an everlasting one. Each generation born has a right to hear the Good News. We must be ever telling the gospel message. Truly the gospel is God's only power unto the saving of souls. The message is already framed and all that requires to be done is to bring it to the world. It must be proclaimed, declared and preached to all who will hear, not only in this country, but to every nation.

The message changes not and must not be changed. The message to be proclaimed today *must be exactly* the same message as that upon the tongues of the faithful apostles. All forms of 'gimmicks' are to be shunned and the preaching must be plain and presented soberly and with due reverence. The aim of the preaching must always be that men shall respond by asking, "Men and brethren, what shall we do to be saved?".

A preacher is not necessarily the product

of some ecclesiastical academy or Training College - indeed most of the early preachers had never heard of such things - but an earnest, dedicated teller of the good news of free pardon. How much preaching is being done by us today? Is it sufficient? Are we satisfied with our efforts. Are we waiting for others to do it all? We have been saved, my brethren. The Lord expects you, my brother, you, my sister, to make the effort to preach the gospel to a dying world. Jesus expects us to go into all the world and to preach to every creature. Are we letting Him down? Are we letting ourselves down? The fields are truly white unto harvest but the labourers are few. Are you one of the few? Are you a preacher of the glad tidings?

ANDREW SHARP,
Newtongrange.

THE TRUTH

One should never be ashamed to own he was wrong, which is but saying in other words, that he is wiser today than he was yesterday.

"Faith on a full stomach may be simple contentment, but if you have it when you're hungry, then it is genuine."

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