

# 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 Lord has been mindful of us**

As I write this editorial we are in the United Kingdom in the throes of a General Election campaign. I must preface my remarks this month by saying that I try (not always successfully) to avoid the constant dumbing down of politicians and genuine political debate that seems to be the modern style of the media. It's quite rare to hear issues debated seriously without the introduction of 'personality' issues. Sometimes this even reduces to the level of time and space being

given to the demeanour, personality and dress-sense of the politician's spouse. I have some respect for people, particularly those who accept 'high' office, who are prepared to put up with the extreme demands on their energy, the constant media intrusion, the tight security that accompanies their every movement and the difficult decisions that have to be taken in the very complex, demanding and 'instant' world that we live in today.

Having said all of that, there is no doubt that when a General Election is called, politicians do then need to leave the secluded world that they inhabit in Parliament and actually get out and engage with the public. The electorate suddenly becomes important because the respective parties want (need) our vote and therefore need to persuade us that their agenda for the next few years is the one that will be best for the country. For a brief period in our democratic process, the electorate is empowered, we enjoy some influence, we are important and relevant and our politicians need to be mindful of us. One of the questions that is posed continually during the course of the election campaign is, 'Who will be in power after the election?' Well, not the electorate, because we will have had our moment in the sun and to a large extent will be put back into the box for a few years; we will have delegated to the new government the right to govern on our behalf.

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## ***The Lord has been mindful of us***

In Psalm 115, the writer reflects upon a question that is still asked today by those who have no conception of God nor faith in His existence. The sceptic asks, "Where is their God?" The Psalmist has a simple but profound answer to that question and then with blinding clarity he emphasizes the massive distinction between an authoritative and powerful God and any man-made alternative that may be compared to Him. "Our God is in the heavens; he does whatever he pleases." Isn't that great – an overwhelmingly simple statement of truth. God is in heaven; he is in control. He then makes the contrast between our God and the work of men's hands contrasting 'Our God' and 'Their idols'. These idols have mouths that do not speak, eyes that do not see; ears that do not hear; noses, that do not smell; unfeeling hands and feet that don't walk; they make no noise out of their throats. The point that the Psalmist is making is that compared to our omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent God, who does whatever he pleases, there is no potential whatsoever for help, counsel, guidance or any other response from the 'work of men's hands'. No doubt the writer had in mind all kinds of graven images and if we generalize these as alternative objects of worship I feel sure that we can readily identify the modern day substitutes that undeservingly attract the 'worship' of men.

After exhorting Israel, the house of Aaron and "all who fear the Lord" to trust the Lord as their help and shield, he expresses this simple truth. **"The Lord has been mindful of us."** Why should we put our trust in the Lord? Because He has been mindful of us! Who is it that has been mindful of us? None less than the almighty and majestic God of the heavens, who has such authority that He does whatever he pleases. One of the contrasts I want to make is between the politician who has only delegated power and every now and again takes some notice of us because he or she needs something from us (our vote), and the almighty God, who Himself has all power by the very nature of his being, who has the authority to do as he pleases, and yet has been unconditionally mindful of us.

## ***A God who provides***

It is often quite salutary at a personal level to reflect on the relatively small group of people who have a real care for us and I'm thinking here not of the range of people who might have some casual interest in our lives, but those who have a genuine and deep-seated love for us; those who would go the extra mile in their care for us. Our close family? A small group of real friends, perhaps? Our Christian community? That's a small number out of the 6 billion or so inhabitants of the world. But when we then add God to that list, the smallness of it is suddenly transformed as we are assured that none less than the eternal God unreservedly has expressed His providential care for us. As the Psalmist says, **"The Lord has been mindful of us; he will bless us; he will bless the house of Israel; he will bless the house of Aaron; he will bless those who fear the Lord, both small and great."**

There are many distinctions that could be drawn between the workings of men and the workings of God. One of the most fundamental is the unconditionality of the provision that God has made for His people. He didn't say to Adam and Eve that they would be provided with a wonderful environment in which to live if they agreed not to eat of the fruit of one particular tree. He made the provision first, let them see the glory of God in His provision and then asked them for obedience in one matter.

For the nation of Israel, He released them from captivity, brought the sea back over the chasing Egyptians, made the bitter water of Marah sweet, provided them an encampment with twelve springs and palm trees, made daily provision of manna and even provided a vision of the glory of the Lord in the cloud. And on the basis of that provision he asked for their trust and obedience. Truly the Lord is mindful of His people.

It is the same pattern that God has established in providing for the salvation of the world. In no sense did God issue a 'vote for me and here is the list of promises that I have for you' agenda. Rather God sent his Son into the world, made the eternal provision for our salvation, and then told mankind what must be done to enjoy the fruits of His provision. No matter how many times they are repeated the words of John's gospel will still have the same resonance. **"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."** God did not bargain about the worth of the life of the Son; he didn't demand a commitment to respond to the gift of grace. He made the provision first, and then told us how to access it. He told the world about the condemned predicament that it was in because of disobedience. He didn't just tell us about what He was doing about it, he showed us what he was doing about it. So we should emphasise more of God's provision and not allow the opponents of Christianity to get away with their mantra that God is a condemning God. He isn't. He is a providing God, a saving God. **"For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him."** The real message to the world is that it is lost, not because of the condemnation of God, but through the deception and evil of Satan, and that in his overwhelming love, God has made provision for our release from the captivity of sin. The provision is eternally made; the onus is on mankind to accept what God has provided, through the sacrifice of the Son.

## ***The Lord will provide***

When I read the account of Abraham's preparedness to offer Isaac to God I admit to a shiver. The mental picture of Abraham building the altar, Isaac, perhaps with growing concern, questioning his father about the whereabouts of the lamb offering and then Abraham binding Isaac and laying him on the altar is almost beyond contemplation. Imagine, perhaps, the terror and look of betrayal in the eyes of Isaac; the tears rolling down the face of Abraham as a father prepares to sacrifice a son. What faith! And as we move that scene forward to Calvary, doesn't it tell us everything that we need to know about our God. After God's intervention, Abraham named the place of the intended sacrifice, "The Lord will provide". And on Calvary, the Lord provided for the world's eternal redemption and salvation. The Lord has been mindful of us.

When Jesus spoke to his disciples before his journey to Jerusalem and the Cross, he knew that on their own, the disciples were incapable of doing what he needed them to do. He made a promise to them of another Counsellor (or Comforter), one like him, but who would **"be with you (the disciples) for ever"**. It is of course a promise that is repeated to Christians for all generations and is the demonstration of the providential care of God that sustains us through our Christian lives until that time when all our hopes are fulfilled and we are face to face with God and our elder brother Jesus. Our rejoicing and joy is this, "The Lord has been mindful of us."



## *The historical and cultural background to the New Testament*

**Ian S Davidson, Motherwell**

In this series of articles I shall be looking at the historical and cultural background of the New Testament. It is an important subject to study. I hope it will lead us all to a better understanding of the Scriptures themselves. Each book of the Bible was written, not in a vacuum, but by a real person, (inspired of course, by the Holy Spirit), in a real setting. Too often people ignore the historical and cultural background of the writer, which can result in some weird and wonderful interpretations of passages in God's word. We strive to understand God's will better. Our efforts should inspire us to know as much about the Bible and its background as possible. What was the world really like in Jesus' day? In what sort of environment did Paul and the early Christians operate? These are fascinating questions to answer. After all, we are talking of a world two thousand years ago – a world very different from ours.

Nevertheless, truth is for every generation and for all time. The truth of the Bible is as relevant today as it was in Paul's day. John Young has written: "The similarities between the Bible characters and ourselves are enormous. The problems they faced were basically our problems – the cost of living, war and peace, getting on with other people, and so on. We find in the Bible people who fell in love, people who hated, people who were anxious and afraid, people who worked, people who laughed and cried, people who fell ill, people who grew old, people who died. The Bible is about men and women like that, and activities like that. It deals with the 'constants' in human life, and deals with them in a profound way. It was a book for the first century. It is a book for the twenty-first century. It is a book for all ages."

### **THE TWO WORLDS**

First, we must consider the general picture. They are two dominant worlds in the New Testament – the Jewish world and the Roman world. They came together and they clashed. The Romans found the Jews quite a handful, as we shall discover. The conquerors soon realised that these descendants of Abraham would never be won over to their pagan ways and so containment became the policy. Granted, some Jews compromised their faith for an easier life, but on the whole there was general resentment and resistance to the Roman occupation of the "Holy Land". The resistance led to violence in the case of the Zealots. Interestingly, one of Jesus' disciples was a former Zealot – Simon (Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13).

Judaism, in Jesus' day, had come a long way from its beginnings. In fact, a period of fifteen hundred years had elapsed since the days of Moses. During that time, the Jews had been through it all – the exodus from Egypt; the giving of the Law; the wandering in the wilderness; the conquering of the promised land; the tribal divisions of the land; the age of the judges; the united monarchy under Saul, David and Solomon; the divided monarchy of the ten-tribe kingdom and the two-tribe kingdom; the destruction of Israel by the Assyrians; the Babylonian captivity; the exile under Persia; the Inter-Testamental period and the Macedonian rule, the Egyptian rule and the Seleucid rule (resisted by the Maccabees); and the Roman rule. The Law remained



throughout, but these experiences inevitably changed Jewish thinking and practices.

## **PALESTINE**

Palestine, homeland of the Jews, was a relatively tiny land – 150 miles from Dan in the north to Beersheba in the south, and less than 50 miles from Jaffa in the west to Jericho in the east. “Its area of less than 10,000 square miles is somewhat smaller than Belgium and a little larger than the state of Vermont, U.S.A.” (Edwin Yamauchi). Yet Palestine was of great strategic importance to many of its large neighbours. Megiddo, for example, saw countless battles in the struggle for domination of the area. To take but one short period: between 323BC (the death of Alexander the Great) and 301BC (the battle of Ipsus) Palestine was crossed or occupied seven times by the Egyptian and Syrian armies. It was difficult for the Jews not to be influenced by the various cultures brought by these powers. (Who can say that the church in America has not been influenced by American culture or the church in Africa by African culture? It is very difficult, if not impossible, to keep the culture out.) The Jews found that and we in Christ, wherever we live, find that today.

## **THE ROMANS**

Pompey, the famous Roman general, was the one who brought to an end Palestine’s political independence. He captured Jerusalem in 63BC. He is said to have entered the Holy of Holies at the time, which infuriated the Jews. It was a bad start for the Roman occupation. Pompey reorganised the area known as the Decapolis and, according to Pliny, the ten original members were Scythopolis, Pella, Dion, Gerasa, Philadelphia, Gadara, Raphana, Kanatha, Hippos and Damascus. Originally, these cities were Greek colonies established to spread the Greek way of life. The Greeks had a huge influence on the ancient world through the efforts of Alexander the Great and both Jewish and Roman societies were much affected by Greek culture.

## **THE HERODS**

The Herods feature strongly in Palestinian history. They were Idumaeans, a tribe forcibly converted to Judaism by the Hasmonaeans. Orthodox Jews were very suspicious of the Herods because they collaborated with the Roman enemy. They were unscrupulous and masters of political intrigue. Antipater was appointed procurator by Julius Caesar in 47BC. But it was Antipater’s son, Herod the Great, who is best remembered of all the family. He was appointed king of Judea in 40BC by Antony and Octavian and by 37BC he had defeated the Hasmonaeen Antigonus after a three months siege of Jerusalem. Herod reigned for thirty-three years. Although always unpopular, “Herod nevertheless showed himself an able, if ruthless, administrator, and throughout his reign the Romans had no reason to rue the day when they appointed him king of the Jews. He consistently upheld the interests of Rome at home and abroad, and indeed he found no contradiction between Rome’s interests and those of his kingdom and his subjects. Their interests, including the preservation of their religious freedom, would be best served, he believed, by integration into the Roman sphere of influence.” (F.F. Bruce).

Herod undertook lavish building projects in his day. He rebuilt, for example, Samaria and renamed it Sebaste and Strato’s Tower on the Mediterranean coast and called it Caesarea. He was involved in the construction of many other settlements and strongholds, including the Antonia fortress near the Temple area. But, of course, the greatest building enterprise of them all was the Jerusalem Temple itself, which was begun in 19BC. They were still working on it eighty years later before it was demolished by the Romans in 70 AD.



**QUESTION – Please explain the vow that Jephthah made to God, mentioned in Judges, Chapter 11.**



Did he or didn't he offer his daughter in sacrifice?

That is the question which Bible students have been asking for generation – even for centuries, and for a great many it is a question to which no quite satisfactory answer has been found. Or, at any rate, no answer with which they are completely comfortable.

It is a pity that, whilst we recognize that Jephthah made a vow which was, it must be admitted, by any standard extremely rash, this is probably the only fact about him with which most Christians are familiar. I suggest, therefore, that, before judging him on this one episode in his life, it would be useful to look at Jephthah a little more closely, because this might help us to gain a clearer understanding of what actually occurred.

**The Background.**

Jephthah's story is found the book of Judges chapters 11 and 12, and reading chapter 11, the first fact that we discover is that this man did not have the best of starts in life. In fact, it seems clear that his early life was disadvantaged racially, social and spiritually.

1st. He was the son of Gilead, who according to the genealogy in 1st Chron. 7:14 was the son of Machir, and Machir himself was the son of Manasseh, the elder son of the great Joseph. In Egypt, with the approval of Pharaoh, Joseph married Asenath the daughter of Potiphera, the priest of the 'Temple to the Sun' in the city of On. Therefore there was a strain of Egyptian blood in his descendants. It is generally considered that the ancestor of the Egyptians and other tribes who settled in Africa was Ham, the youngest son of Noah, and this means that Jephthah was not of pure Semitic blood.

2nd. He was the son of a prostitute and consequently his illegitimacy also affected his social position. It meant that he had no legal rights in his father's family, and no claim to his father's property.

3rd. His father Gilead, however, had other sons by a wife whose name is not recorded, and there came a time when, because of Jephthah's origin, these sons declared that they had no intention of allowing their illegitimate half-brother to share in the family inheritance. Jephthah was obviously an innocent victim in this situation, yet, severe as this decision was, it was fully in accordance with Mosaic Law which declared that only sons born in wedlock had the right to inherit (Deut. 21: 17-19). Therefore, when the sons of Gilead disowned Jephthah, their action had to be upheld by the Elders of the tribe, with the result that he was sent away.

Judges 11: 3 tells us that he '*fled from his brethren and dwelt in the land of Tob*', a district in Syria, from where it is thought his mother originated, and where, also, in the course of time, he gained a somewhat questionable reputation as '*a mighty man of valour*' who had gathered about him a small army of men described unflatteringly as '*vain*'. This Hebrew adjective '*req*', means '*empty*', and two chapters earlier, it is the word used to describe the kind of men who had been hired by Abimelech. They are said to have been '*vain and light persons*'.

How Jephthah and his men survived in the territory of the Syrians, and how he acquired his 'strong man' reputation, we are not told. But this does not appear to have worried the Elders of the tribe of Gilead back in Palestine because, when faced with a desperate situation, it did not deter them from sending for him and inviting him to become the 'Captain' of their forces. At first, not surprisingly, Jephthah's response was not enthusiastic. He reminded them of the humiliating manner in which they had treated him. (ch.11:7) But when they made him the proverbial 'offer he could not refuse' (v.8), he became Chief of the tribe of Gilead, and led the

army against the invading Ammonites.

### **The Vow.**

It was at this time that he made the vow for which he will always be remembered. (v. 30) Now, there is nothing unusual in the fact that he made a vow to God before going into battle, because this was a common practice among the ancient tribes of O.T. times, and, indeed, it has survived to our own days! What makes Jephthah's vow unusual is the promise he made to God, in return for giving him victory in battle.

What *did* he vow? Notice the emphatic word in verse 31. In the A.V. the word is '*whatsoever*', but modern versions, including the R.S.V. which I have before me as I write, gives us '*whoever*'; and this is the certainly the more accurate rendering. In fact, it is the word used in the Hebrew text and in both the Septuagint and the Vulgate versions of the passage. Jephthah promised that, "*Whoever comes out of the doors of my house shall surely be the Lord's, to be offered up by me as a burnt offering*".

But what did he have in mind – always assuming he was thinking logically! Do you really think that on his return from battle, he was expecting a *lamb or goat, or some other sacrificial animal* to come out of his house to meet him? Suppose some *unclean animal* – say, a dog, had run out, and was the first to meet its master, would he have felt obligated to fulfil his vow? If you say he was not expecting an animal to emerge from his house you are doubtlessly right! We must face the fact that he was promising to offer a human sacrifice.

But, what sort of man was Jephthah?

1. Was he an ignorant man, who did not know God's Law?
2. Was he a bad man who knew the Law and went ahead anyway?
3. Was he a good man, who realized he had made a mistake and had the courage to draw back from offending God?

These are just a few of the questions that arise when we try to reach a reasonable conclusion.

### **A Vow made in Ignorance?**

Now, some commentators suggest that, if we consider that he was of '*semi-heathen parentage*' because his mother was an Aramean (Syrian), it should not altogether surprise us that Jephthah made such a vow. They tell us that, having lived among the Syrians for a number of years, he would be fully aware that such a practice was common among the Canaanite tribes, And they also point out that, as Gen.22 records, even Abraham had been prepared to offer up his son Isaac as a burnt offering, when his faith was put to the test by God Himself.

Again, when the King of Moab, desperate in the face of imminent defeat, sacrificed his own son, his action produced a wave of anger (2nd Kings 3:27). And even later, Manasseh, the evil King of Judah, sacrificed his son to the idol Moloch, a fact that again the scriptures record with obvious revulsion (2nd Kings 21; 6).

### **Was it carried out?**

What we really want to know is was this rash vow actually carried out, or was it retracted and replaced by some other course of action? And it is here that opinions differ.

There are many, including great and good men of past centuries, who believe that, as appalling as it is to us, the daughter of Jephthah actually paid with her life for her father's rashness. Some have expressed the view that Jephthah was actually expecting to sacrifice a *slave* and was shocked when the first person to greet him on his return was his only daughter, but, they say, having vowed, he felt he could not go back on his vow. Incidentally, would it have been any *less* appalling if it had, indeed, been '*merely a slave*' who first came out of the house, and was sacrificed as a consequence?

But, there are several issues that we need to consider.

- 1) **There is the fact that God had neither commanded nor desired the making of such a vow as this.** Furthermore, nowhere in the scriptures do we find any recurrence of it. If the exceptional case of Abraham and his son Isaac is quoted, we should understand that the test was set by God, not to prove *to God* the strength of Abraham's faith, because God already knew both Abraham's strengths and weaknesses. The test was designed to reveal the strength of his faith *to Abraham himself*, and because God knew beforehand what the outcome would be, the life of Isaac was never really in danger.
- 2) **Human sacrifices were clearly and emphatically forbidden by the Law of Moses.** (Lev.18:21; Jer.7:31; Ezek.16:21 etc.,) because the practice was an identifying mark of idolatry and was the reason why the inhabitants of Canaan were driven out and the land given to the Israelites (Deut. 12:30-31).

The prohibition of the shedding of blood, first set out in Gen. 9:6, is also frequently repeated in the O.T. scriptures, and the sacredness of blood is made abundantly clear in the Law. If the Elders, the religious leaders of Gilead, had allowed Jephthah to carry through his rash pledge, not only would they have been guilty of descending to the level of their cruel pagan neighbours, they would, in fact, have shared Jephthah's guilt for the sin of deliberate disobedience of the Mosaic Law.

Some have argued that Jephthah was perhaps ignorant of the law of God relating to human sacrifice, but I suggest that this is inconceivable. We cannot believe that the Elders of His people did not know the Law, and they may even have advised him that adherence to the Law of God should always take precedence over any rashly made vow.

- 3) **"Obedience is better than sacrifice".** This was God's message to King Saul, brought by the prophet Samuel (1st Sam.15:22). Jephthah was faced with a choice between abandoning his vow, or persisting in offering to God a sacrifice which He had expressly forbidden, and which, we may be absolutely sure, was not acceptable to Him.

It is true the Hebrews regarded failure to keep a vow as an extremely serious matter, especially a vow made to God. But it would be better for Jephthah to abandon a vow he ought never to have made, rather than to violate the sacred Law of God.

- 4) **But was Jephthah ignorant of God's law?** It has also been argued by some writers that he was. But, when we read the message he sent to the King of the Ammonites, recorded in ch.11. 15-27, we find that he shows an impressively detailed knowledge of Israel's history and a clear understanding of God's dealings with His people during their journey from Egypt to the Promised Land. Indeed, he must have known about the Covenant made at Sinai, and the Laws delivered to Israel through Moses.
- 5) **Was Jephthah an upright man?** At the other end of the spectrum, there are biblical scholars who claim that Jephthah was '*not a freebooter,*' that is, not a man who lived by plundering other tribes, but a man of high principles and a true worshipper of God. We must accept this assessment. After all, his name appears in Hebrews 11; 32, as one of those honoured by God because they lived 'by faith'. The question then arises; would a true worshipper of God, *deliberately disobey* the revealed will and law of God, and commit an act which God would regard as repulsive? I believe that he would not. Recognizing the course of action to what his rash vow committed him, he would seek an honourable release from it.
- 6) **Was there any solution?** Numbers 30:16 reveals that vows were not always irrevocable, and Leviticus chapter 27 contains divinely revealed instruction concerning the redemption of what are described as '*votive offerings*'. Now, the word '*votive*' means '*that which is dedicated in fulfilment of a vow*', and in this chapter it relates particularly to whatever was promised in vows to God.



The chapter explains that there were four different types of votive offerings (vows) that could be redeemed. They were vows that involved human beings, animals, house and lands. For instance, a man might have vowed to dedicate to God, either himself, or a member of his family, or possibly a slave. But the passage tells us that it was possible to *redeem* the person – or thing – that had been so dedicated, by handing over a prescribed amount of money to the priest. This law means that Jephthah's daughter could be redeemed and need not die.

If it is thought that the last few verses of the chapter say something different that is not the case, because those verses deal with a quite different situation.

a) The first part of the chapter 27 deals with the 'vow' - '*neder*,' such as Jephthah made. The word '*nadar*' means '*to make a vow*' and describes Jephthah's action - it is what Jephthah did!

b) The verses from v.28 lay down the law relating to things that were '*devoted*,' and here we have a different word, the word '*cherem*'. '*Cherem*' identifies any object or person that could *not be redeemed*, but which must be destroyed. Not destroyed because of a decision made by man, but because of God's command.

These last few verses explain why this was the case. There were two classes of people and things that could never be '*redeemed*, either:-

- i) Because God had already issued an explicit command with regards to what must be done with them, or:-
- ii) Because they had been claimed by Him, and therefore they already belonged to Him, and one can never '*buy back*' from God that which He declares is already His!

Think, in this connection, about His command concerning the destruction of Jericho; or His instruction to King Saul concerning the destruction of the evil King Agag and the Amalekites. All were '*cherem*' - under the ban – and could not be spared.

### **Conclusion.**

Jephthah was clearly appalled when he realized that his rash vow had jeopardized the life of his only daughter, his *only* child, and when he contemplated the horror of what he had planned to do. The conversation that he had with her, shows that he was well aware of what the Law said concerning vows, and it is my personal view that he availed himself of the opportunity presented by the Law, to be released from his vow.

The outcome was that his daughter was not made a burnt-offering; instead her father surrendered her to the service of God, in which state she remained unmarried. We are told that he had vowed that, whoever came out to meet him '*should be YHVH's*. That is, *belong to God*. And his daughter was the first to greet him. He kept his promise. She was dedicated to the service of God, and remained unmarried for the rest of her life.

Her father was denied the companionship of his only child, and her dedication to God's service in this manner meant the end of his hopes of grandchildren. She was denied a husband, and there would be no-one to carry on the family name, which was one of the greatest sorrows that could be inflicted on a Hebrew. But although it was she who paid the heaviest price for her father's rashness, at least she remained alive.

If there is one simple lesson we should take from this strange story, it is that we should always be careful what we promise, and never be afraid to retract a promise that should never have been made in the first place.

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# Alive in the Christ

## THE RESURRECTED LIFE

Ernest Makin, Wigan

### DEAD TO THE WORLD

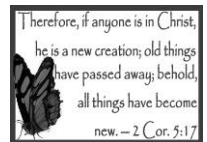
I am a Christian, a disciple of the Christ Jesus. I have died to this world. I have been resurrected as a 'new creation', and I will attempt to live a 'sanctified life'. If I am successful in this lifetime's activity because I remain faithful to my 'Lord and Saviour' I will be 'saved'. I must not lose heart; 'even though my outer nature is wasting away, my inner nature is being renewed every day'. The same text tells me to bear the 'slight momentary affliction' of this present physical experience because it is preparing me for an eternal weight of glory that is beyond all comparison. Having eschewed such behaviour as outbursts of anger, wrath, malice, slander and foul talk from our living, we are exhorted not to lie to each other; and all this because we have 'put off the old nature with its practices' and replaced the old with a new nature, 'which is being renewed in KNOWLEDGE AFTER THE IMAGE OF ITS CREATOR'.

Chapter 6 of Paul's letter to all the saints in Rome, who are beloved of God, illustrates how believers are '**dead to sin**' and are '**alive in the Christ**'. (Read Romans 6:1-13) In the two following chapters of this letter is revealed how a loving Father has made provision for the JUSTIFICATION and REDEMPTION of those who acknowledge His Son as LORD AND SAVIOUR. There then follows the revelation of SANCTIFICATION, 'id est' the manner in which the Christian grows into a spiritual maturity which is '**a measure of the stature of the fullness of the Christ**'. (Read Ephesians 4)

Paul illustrates how a God, whose essence is absolute love, has freed His 'children', called 'saints', from the tyranny of sin, freedom from the utter condemnation of the Law, and provides the refreshing, regenerating and renewing life in the glorious fellowship of the Holy Spirit. To read Romans chapters six, seven and eight is to view in short compass the whole panoply of a PROVIDING GOD who loves His new creation beyond all measure.

### A RADICAL CHANGE

The 'new birth', is that work of all three persons of the Godhead, in which the Holy Spirit is the most active Person, through which the soul of man, previously dead in sin, is created anew in righteousness. (Read Titus 3:5-7) The Spirit of God cleanses, quickens (i.e. makes alive), and renews. Such a remarkable passage into spirituality, (see 1 John 3:14), is described as being "**born again and being born from above**" (John 3:3-7); being "**a renewal of the mind**", (Romans 12:1/2); becoming "**a new creature**", (2 Cor. 5:16); having "**the Christ formed in your heart**", (Gals. 4:19); being "**quickened to a life of holiness**", (Eph.2:1-6); and being made "**a partaker of the divine nature**", (2 Peter 1:3/4).



This is a radical change of the most profound type since it involves 'being made alive from the dead', Romans 6:13. The profundity of the process of being 'MADE ALIVE FROM THE DEAD' is reflected through such scriptural statements as:

**"He (the Father) rescued us from the domain of darkness,(through the redemptive work of the Son) and transferred us to the kingdom of His Beloved Son,(by the regenerating activity of the Holy Spirit), in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."** (Colossians 1:13).

Such is the foundational importance in the redemptive process of this transfer from a condemned to a redemptive state, (that is being made alive when we were dead), that as Saul of Tarsus journeyed

on his murderous mission to Damascus, he was confronted by the risen and glorified Christ, who said, **"I have appeared to you to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you rescuing you from the Jewish people and the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light, and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me."** (Acts 26:16-18)

## **A NEW CREATION**

In the spiritual transfer 'from the power of Satan to the dominion of God', as above, those who have made the passage into spirituality are truly able to say, with Paul being an example, **"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but the Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself up for me."** (Gals.2:20) See also the following inspired utterances of Paul the apostle Galatians 5:24, 6:14; Romans 6:8-10 and Romans 6:7.

The apostle John reveals that those who 'receive' Jesus, i.e. to those who believe in His name, have been given the authority to become the 'children of God' and have been born of God and born 'from above' as opposed to the physical process of birth. This newborn babe will have a new heart; **"moreover I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh"**. So then, being born of God results in a transformation of the heart and mind, **"If the Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised the Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you."**

The 'new creation', (see 2 Cor.5:17/18), through the creative and quickening act of the Spirit of God has been cleansed, (Titus 3;5-7), and that cleansing is by the mercy of a loving God, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, and **"not by any righteousness we have done"**. This work of God, for indeed **"we are HIS masterpiece created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we could walk in them"**, was while we were **"dead in our trespasses and sins."** This is described as the life providing process, **"even when we were dead in our transgressions, he made us alive together with the Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him in the heavenly places in the Christ Jesus"**. Romans 6:4-6 describes in a beautiful metaphor this spiritual resurrection into a new life. Spiritual privileges in immeasurable quantity are available for the believer who is made a partaker of the divine nature.

Formerly **"separate from the Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world"**, but now made **"alive in the Christ"** we have been **"brought near by the blood of the Christ"**. Everything in the life of a sinner who has become a saint, who was dead in sin and has now become alive in the Christ assumes a newness. The believer has a new name, enters a new relationship in a new spiritual family. Armed with a new mind as part of a new nature he shares in new victories because of the final victory of the Christ.

**"Be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth."** There is now a changed and new destiny, the spiritually alive have a blessed hope and assurances, the foundation of which is the life, the crucifixion and death, and the glorious resurrection of the Son of God. **"For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith."** (1 John 5:14)

**Could Jesus  
have walked  
away? – some  
reflections in  
response**

I remember once listening to Len Channing and I think it was at Albert Street, Wigan, sometime in the 1970's. He was not addressing the particular conundrum of last month's editorial ('Could Jesus have walked away?'), but I think his comments have a bearing on them.

Len posed the question: 'Could Jesus have sinned?' Obviously there was the tension between His human self and His divine nature. Len's answer has stuck in my mind and I've found it to be most helpful. It was "Yes, and No". Yes, there was nothing in his humanity that would have prevented Him from sinning, so his temptations were real. But, 'No' because to sin would have done such violence to His nature that it would have been impossible for Him to do so.

Len illustrated his point this way. He asked this question of himself, 'Could I murder my children in cold blood?' He answered in this way. 'Yes, and No. Yes, there is nothing in my humanity to prevent me from taking up a knife and killing them in cold blood. The knife would not suddenly change into soft rubber so that I couldn't do it. But, No I couldn't, because such a deed would do such violence to my nature that I couldn't do it, even to the point of forfeiting my own life instead. There is nothing in the world would ever make me murder them in cold blood.'

Jesus, he said, could not sin, not because His humanity was so different from ours that He simply couldn't, so there was no power or purpose behind the temptations he suffered, but because any sin would have done such violence to His nature; and nobody can ever do anything which does violence to their true nature. So this rendered Him sinless even to the point of forfeiting His life.

My own comment now. Not to go to the Cross against the express wishes of the Father, would have done such violence to His nature that there was never any doubt that He would go through with it because His nature was always to do His Father's will, but it did not prevent His humanity from hoping that just maybe His Father's will could somehow be altered. The desire not to go to Calvary was powerful and real and had to be surrendered to the Father's will, just as did every other aspect of His life here on Earth.



So, my answer to the question posed in the editorial, and taking my cue from Len, would be: 'Yes, and No.' I hope the above comments are helpful though I don't take credit for them – I just acknowledge my debt to Len.

**Graham A. Fisher, Elmhurst.**



## What do you think?

### **DOES THE CHRISTIAN HAVE A 'RIGHT TO DIE'?**

In the weeks leading up to the death of Pope John Paul 2, some people expressed disquiet about the relatively public display of the failing health of the Pontiff. Others said that this was the Pope's very deliberate demonstration of his belief in the sanctity of life; that he wanted people to see that physical suffering was something to be borne with patience and dignity. In this he was perhaps fortunate that he was (I assume) able to receive the very best medical care that was available. Nevertheless he was an intransigent and consistent opponent of abortion, contraception and euthanasia and made no concessions to liberal thinking in these areas.

At about the same time there was a religious and political furore in America about the case of a 41 year old woman, Terri Schiavo, who had been in a 'persistent vegetative state' since 1990 and who was being kept alive by artificial means. Her husband applied through the judicial Courts for the right to have doctors switch of the life-support machines, with her death being the inevitable result. President Bush himself became involved in the case arguing that it would be absolutely wrong for such leave to be granted. In the end the husband's wish was granted, life-support withdrawn and the patient duly died.

Medical science is not going away. As time goes on the ability of doctors to identify the nature of injury and disease and the likely medical prognosis improves. At the same time the ability to maintain life, however low the quality of it, and albeit in some cases only by what are called 'artificial' means, also improves. Evidence would suggest that in our hospitals in the UK, doctors have for some time employed the DNR (Do Not Resuscitate) criteria in determining 'patient care', sometimes unknown to relatives, other times with their knowledge and compliance.

#### **Advance Directives and Living Wills**

Advance Directives and Living Wills are becoming quite common methods for individuals to take some control of the circumstances of their death. An Advance Directive is a formal written document, which tells a doctor what kind of care a person would like to have if unable to make decisions. (Legally in the UK, provided that a patient is deemed competent to give consent to a treatment, then any **refusal** of consent is valid and doctors must accept the desire not to be treated). Advance Directives tell the doctors that you don't want certain types of treatment if you are ill. For example, it could specify that you don't want to be put on a ventilator if you are in a coma. Advance Directives can also state that you would like a certain treatment no matter how ill you are (though doctors are not always obliged to give it).

A Living Will is a type of advance directive that only comes into effect when you are deemed to be terminally ill (usually held to mean that you have less than 6 months to live).

Advance Directives/Living Wills are already legally established in the USA. In the UK a patient's advance refusal of treatment is binding on doctors under common law (law developed through court cases), though no Act of Parliament has yet been passed. They are encouraged by the British Medical Association and Law Commission and opinion polls show that 2/3rds of British people would like to see parliamentary legislation.

A distinct differentiation is claimed between advance directives/living wills and euthanasia, not least because euthanasia remains wholly illegal and advance directives/living wills do not authorise in any respect the process of euthanasia.

#### **Matters of life and death**

Almost all major world religions hold strongly to the concept of the sanctity of life, even though the reasons for this may differ particularly in some of the Eastern religions. The Roman Catholic Church

does not accept that human beings have a 'right to die' and insists that anyone who claims that right is denying the truth of their fundamental relationship with God. In his *Evangelium Vitae* of 1995, Pope John Paul 2 wrote, "*True compassion leads to sharing another's pain; it does not kill the person whose suffering we cannot bear.*" Nevertheless, Catholicism does regard it as morally acceptable to refuse 'extraordinary and aggressive medical means' to preserve life. The 1991 National Conference of Catholic Bishops asserted that, "*...life is the most basic gift of a loving God- a gift over which we have stewardship but not absolute dominion.*"

If anything, Judaism is even more robust in its view. "*..The message of Judaism is that one must struggle until the last breath of life. Until the last moment, one has to live and rejoice and give thanks to the Creator...*" Dr. Rachamim Melamed-Cohen, *Jewsweek*, March 2002. Lord Jakobovits, the former UK Chief Rabbi has said, "*The value of human life is infinite and beyond measure, so that any part of life – even if only an hour or a second – is of precisely the same worth as 70 years of it, just as any fraction of infinity, being indivisible, remains infinite.*"

The preservation of human life is one of the supreme moral values of Judaism. Anything that might shorten life is forbidden; life is sacred and is not ours to dispose of. Yet even here there is what may be regarded as caveats. Judaism would acknowledge that if someone's life was ending in serious pain, doctors have no duty to make that person suffer more by artificially extending their dying moments. Some Rabbis have ruled that a dying patient should not be kept alive by artificial means where the treatment does not cure the illness but merely prolongs the patient's life temporarily and the patient is suffering great pain.

The traditional Christian view is that life is a God-given gift and should be preserved; that there should be no interference with the natural process of death. Birth and death are part of natural life processes that God has created and so we should respect them equally. Because life is God-given it possesses an intrinsic dignity and value; we are sharing the life of God. Some might say that life is God's to give and His to take away and that for the faithful Christian there can be a profound spiritual dimension, even if accompanied by pain and suffering, in the contemplation of and preparation for death. Yet most Christians would perhaps share the concessions about artificial means of life-preservation and unnecessary prolongation of life noted above. The problem is that such concessions can only ever be subjective.

### **What do You Think?**

Christian young people today will grow up in a world that has a much readier acceptance of advance directives/living wills than we are used to. Before we rush to judgement in that respect, it is a reality, rightly or wrongly, that attitudes to some moral dilemmas change over the generations. I suspect there was a time, not that long ago, when most Christians would regard, for example, 'artificial' contraception with horror. Yet I have never heard a sermon condemning it. Unfortunately medical/moral dilemmas are here to stay.

- **What would you say to a Christian contemplating making a Living Will;**
- **Should every means always be used to preserve life ie. Ventilators when independent life is no longer possible;**
- **What would you emphasize of traditional Christian teaching about the sanctity of life to a young Christian;**
- **Does God actually make countless decisions to "take life"; (we often hear the phrase 'the Lord has called him/her'; 'God has taken him/her to be with Him');**
- **Do you accept any difference between Living Wills and euthanasia (I am assuming no Christian would support euthanasia or suicide);**
- **Have you been called upon to decide about the continuation/withholding of treatment; how did that experience affect you.**

The above only scratches the surface of a real dilemma and your contributions in response are invited. (NB Most information is taken from BBC's website at: [www.bbc.co.uk/health/bereavement/terminal\\_living\\_wills.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/health/bereavement/terminal_living_wills.shtml) )

## **News and Information**

### **Ghana Appeal**

We thank those who have donated to this appeal for the Lord's Church in Ghana. Through this, not only have brethren been able to extend the Church further, but many have been cured of ailments, some of which would otherwise have been fatal.

As new churches are established and existing ones grow we continue to be asked for help in providing benches and Bibles. A brother also requests a study Bible and if anyone has one to spare we would be pleased to forward it to him.

Although our funds are insufficient to commence new building, the meeting-house of one congregation is now complete except for the concrete floor. They now have electricity and so are able to see clearly for evening meetings.

In one congregation a ten year old girl requires blood transfusions, a brother requires an operation for hernia and a sister with typhoid hernia requires surgery. Elsewhere a brother who travels on a bicycle to encourage and strengthen churches has had an accident and requires surgery before he can continue doing this. Another brother needs treatment for typhoid and help is needed with the hospital bill for a brother with a respiratory ailment.

To conclude on a happy note we have received a recent photograph of the child with serious internal defects, reported in July 2002. Her name is Christabel and thanks to your support she is now a bright, healthy little girl. We also express

our grateful thanks for the donation of £1000 received in February receipt no.208

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** **Sis. Jenny Kirk**

### **Kelso, Scotland**

The small congregation in Kelso sadly reports the death of Sister Jenny Kirk on Thursday April 14th. She will be sadly missed, not only by the brethren there but also by congregations throughout central Scotland and farther afield.

Jenny was brought to Christ by the work and witness of the brethren in Corby in 1969. She met at Corby for many years and was well grounded in the faith before returning to Scotland and finally returning to Kelso in retirement.

The hallmark of her Christian life was the energy and spirit she displayed on a daily basis. She had a very bright personality and a faith that shone through and she had that rare gift, the ability to influence others and lead them to Christ. Jenny was the moving force in establishing the congregation in Kelso and in promoting it through mini gospel campaigns held in the community centre.

Romans 8:37 was a favourite quotation, *'in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us'*.

She certainly demonstrated, these last few months, the courage and tenacity to overcome as she battled with a terminal illness. It did not separate her from the God she served and her faith gave her the victory she sought.

We seek God's blessing on her husband Bobby, daughter Janette and family and also on the brethren in Kelso. Please remember them in your prayers.

The funeral service, which was held in the Evangelical Church Hall, Kelso, was led by Bro John Kneller and the interment at Kelso cemetery by Bro Gordon Montgomery.

A good number of congregations were represented and many friends from the local community were also in attendance, the presence of so many clearly testifying to the regard with which Jenny was held.

**John Kneller.**

## Coming Events

### **Peterhead Annual Social**

Saturday 1st and  
Sunday 2nd October 2005.

### **Saturday**

3.00pm start followed by refreshments  
6.00pm Evening Service

### **Sunday**

10.00 am Bible Class  
11.00 am Breaking of Bread  
6.00 pm Gospel meeting

*Speakers:* Frank Worgan (Corby)  
and Mitch Vick (Stirling)

*A warm welcome awaits all.*

### **Stretford, Manchester**

The Church meeting in Stretford invites you to 3 special Saturday Meetings in the Green Hut, 538 Kings Road, Stretford, Manchester.

Each meeting at 7.00pm.

The talks will be followed by light refreshments and discussion.

### **September 17th –**

*Speaker:* Robert Marsden, Wigan

### **October 22nd –**

*Speaker:* John Morgan, Hindley.

### **November 19th –**

*Speaker:* Mark Hill, Loughborough.

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