

# 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"***

## BE INSPIRED...

Most of us at some time will have created something that gave us immense satisfaction. It may have been a piece of music, a painting, a piece of furniture made with you own hands, a gourmet meal dish, an outstanding piece of academic work, a performance on the sports field.... The very listing of such possibilities reminds us again of the unique creation that mankind is.

When David reflected on God's creation, he mused, **"When I look at thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou has established; what is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou dost care for him?"** (Psalm 8:3,4)

David goes on largely to answer his own question by recognizing that God made mankind to be "little less than God," and that in his infinite wisdom God had chosen to give mankind dominion over all the other living forms of creation. The fact that mankind has let God down, at times to the point of God's despair at having created man, does not lessen the fact we are God's ultimate creation and that His love for us is so overwhelming as to demand the ultimate sacrifice.

What is man that thou art mindful of him? Let us allow Paul to answer David's question. Paul reminds the Church at Ephesus that it was out of God's great love for us that he has made Christians alive together with Christ, raised us up with him and made us to sit in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. As always there is purpose in God's planning and he has chosen his "new creation", Christians who are striving to be like their Master, to show the true attributes of our God in his created world. **"For we are his workmanship (masterpiece), created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.** (Eph 2:10)

When the artist, chef, carpenter or musician creates his or her own masterpiece, it is the skill of the creator alone that is reflected in the final product. Of course the tools or ingredients used have some impact but they do not make any choices of their own to define the result. Yet God has chosen to allow the quality of his handiwork to be reflected through living, breathing, animate people. What extraordinary confidence God places in His people, **"created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness,"** to show the quality of his workmanship.

Shall we redouble our efforts, in thankfulness to God for the new nature that he has given us, to ensure that when he surveys his masterpiece, a smile of satisfaction touches his face?

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# Get a (renewed) Life!!

(Doug Melling, Wigan)

Most of us have heard the saying 'Get a Life'. It's a comment often made by someone who considers another's life to be unexciting, mundane and predictable. If those attending the Fellowship Weekend in Wigan had been asked by their secular friends how they were spending the Bank Holiday, no doubt the thought 'get a life' would pass through their minds when told it was to be spent in Christian fellowship. Yet ironically, that is precisely why we as Christians desire to enjoy the fellowship of other Christians, because we have a life – a renewed life. Of course it isn't the life that they might advocate – one spent in seeking after those things which satisfy our own selfish aims – rather it's a meaningful and rewarding life that comes through being motivated by God and in particular what he has achieved for us through Jesus, His Son and our Saviour.

I have always tended to be a practical person. If something needs to be done that occupies my intellect and time, an end product that can be seen must result to justify the time and effort spent. As a Civil Engineer over many years the time spent in the planning and design of major highway schemes was worthwhile because something visible resulted from it. Occasionally, usually for political reasons, schemes would be scrapped and confined to the archives, taking away the satisfaction and worth of the time and effort spent.

Christianity is not theory, but practice, and the product of our association with Jesus should without any doubt result in our lives being renewed. A renewed life results fundamentally from beliefs leading to actions, but all based on what God, through Jesus, has done to enable that renewal to take place.

## God's part in a renewed life

All of God's actions are those of a loving God whose desire is that none should perish but that all should have the opportunity of **a new life in Christ**. Our new life in Christ is underpinned by the continuity of God's revelation to mankind – the foretelling of the Redeemer, God's enduring faithfulness to his people and the ultimate expression of his power and authority in raising people from the dead.

The fact that so many of the matters of first importance that relate to our salvation are relatively simple to understand is a source of great comfort. As we consider our spiritual renewal, let's reflect on how the renewed life begins.

Under normal circumstances a child, when born, will grow, mature and experience the physical blessings that God has made available in this life. This does not depend on faith because as Matthew 5:45 informs us, "God causes the sun to shine on the unrighteous as well as the righteous." However the scriptures allude to those living in the world but without Christ as the 'living dead' – alive to this life but dead God's eternal blessings because of sin. (cf Ephesians 2:1-5; Colossians 2:13) Hence a renewed life commences with a recognition of our sinful state and God's ability to lift us out of that sin, effectively changing us from the 'living dead' to the 'living living'. In John 3:3-5 the scriptures refer to being born again of water and of the spirit. Today we often hear the expression 'born again Christians' as if to differentiate between them and some other form of Christian. The only Christians mentioned in scripture are those who have yielded themselves to Jesus by being born again in baptism.

So there is the start of the renewed life – being born again of water and the Spirit with both elements of the rebirth being vital. Immersion in water as a burial and death of the old man and the receipt of God’s Spirit to guide us in a life of service to Jesus. Romans 6:1-11 is worth re-reading in full to highlight the point with particular emphasis on verses 4 through 11.

### Our part in a renewed life

Jesus frequently used everyday illustrations to enable his hearers, and ourselves as readers, to understand important teaching concerning himself, God, the eternal promises for God’s people and the way His followers should conduct themselves. So just imagine this. A large electricity company provides supplies to your house. The company distributes literature to ask its customers to inform them of all their services and you, as a responsible consumer, read it thoroughly. Your knowledge of the provision even extends to whether the electricity is generated by nuclear, wind, gas or some other form of energy. Winter arrives with dark nights and cold temperatures. Yet despite all of the information and the assurances of the electricity provider you have to sit in your house shivering and without light. What’s gone wrong? What is the electricity company doing about it? You are about to ring and complain when someone gently asks if the appliances you need to use are switched on. The fault of course is yours – the electricity supplier has met all its obligations but you have done nothing. Sound at all familiar. Don’t we sometimes, despite all the provision God has already made, still sit back and wait for God to ‘work in our lives?’

For the past several months, in connection with the aftermath of the Iraq war, many news reports and debates have referred to the need to ‘winning the hearts and minds of the people’. Defeating the Iraqi army was relatively easy given the huge weaponry that was deployed against it, but most political commentators (and one would hope the politicians themselves) recognise that without the hearts and minds of the people, long term success will not prevail. This is precisely what God wants from us, our committed heart and mind, and unless this is the starting point of our relationship with Him, most of our efforts will fall short of the high standards he seeks and a renewed life will struggle to blossom.

Paul, in his epistles, informed the early Christians of that necessity – that it is a changed mind that results in a changed or renewed life. “Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.” (Romans 12:1,2) The transformation is the product of the renewed mind. The greater the renewal, the greater will be the transformation and, conversely, the less will be the conformation to the world. This is the key to the renewed life – a mind that considers matters pertaining to Jesus more important than anything else.

We need to bear in mind that a renewed life is not a once-off event but an ongoing process. The renewed life commences with baptism, but by no means ends there. It is for **life** and needs to be worked at, be fed with spiritual food, to grow and to increase in knowledge and understanding of God’s word. And yes, a visible end product should result – the renewed life of service to Jesus that will glorify God with its beauty.

### Some outworkings and blessings of a renewed life

It might be useful for the reader at this point to read again Ephesians 4:22-32, a passage that speaks of the blessings of the renewed life.

Sometimes the 'thou shalt not's' of scripture may be regarded as simply negative and non-productive. Not so in my view. We are encouraged as Christians to live pure and holy lives in service to God and in this context the 'thou shalt not's' represent positive aspects of Christian living that help to achieve the purity and holiness that God desires of us. So, in Ephesians 4:22 we are first told to put off the old nature which is corrupt through deceitful lusts. This then clears the way for the new nature which is created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. Note that there are two actions required of us – a putting off and a putting on.

For most people this will not happen overnight but will be a lifelong and a continuous process if we are to successfully remove the bad and replace it with the good. Galatians 5 contrasts the works of the flesh with the fruit of the Spirit. The process is ongoing both to exclude and prevent from re-entry the evil things in order that the nurture and growth of the spiritual fruit may occur.

In the Ephesian passage referred to above, Paul makes many straightforward statements regarding how the renewed mind will be manifest in a renewed life. The renewed life should reflect one who is living on a 'higher plain', because it is God orientated and God motivated and indeed the renewed life will shun many things that the world considers to be acceptable. It is a well used phrase that a boat should be in the water, not the water in the boat. Well, the Church should be in the world, and not the world in the Church. The individual Christian can't avoid living in the world, but can avoid the world living in him or her.

There are so many things that are acceptable in the world that should not enter the mind of the Christian. Last year, when my wife was involved in a road accident, we were told that we were foolish not to claim for whiplash injury. The fact that she hadn't suffered whiplash injury seemed irrelevant to them when there was the prospect of compensation of several thousands of pounds. One of the fundamentals of Christianity, which shall be manifest in the renewed life is that we should be honest and our word true (Eph 4:25) And the same principle can apply to many of the moral standards acceptable to the world but frowned upon by God regarding, for example, relationships outside marriage, homosexuality etc.

## A renewed life is different

If there is little perceptible difference between Christian and non-Christian, between the 'living living' and the 'living dead', then where is the renewed life? The Bible points us in the right direction which reveals God's way, the way that leads to eternity in His presence. Ephesians 1:15-20 provides a glimpse of what the glorious renewed life means to the Christian.

Get a Life!! We certainly have. It's a renewed life – one that doesn't seek to please itself, but please Christ. A life that seeks to exhibit love rather than hatred; that considers others before ourselves. It's a life that is openly honest and truthful and considers service to Christ not as a sacrifice of worldly pursuits, but rather the pursuit of matters of first and fundamental importance.

Indeed, this renewed life is motivated by the love that God has shown toward us through His Son, Jesus and it manifests the glorious hope – or rather the assurance – of eternity in God's presence.

# Practical Christianity

## THE ROAD TO RECOVERY

(David Yasko, USA)

Last month we realized that when we try to control the universe we end up with fatigue, fear, frustration, and failure. So how do we break away from those things? Well, we have to get past something called "**Denial.**" Denial is what keeps us from moving into recovery. Denial is excusing ourselves from our sins. We use phrases like, "it's really no problem, everybody is doing it. I'm not the worst one out here." The problem with excusing ourselves from our sins means we accuse others. We go on by saying things like, "If you would just get your act together, we could have the world." So denial is just another version of the blame game and we have to learn how to deal with it. What makes us face up to denial? God's antidote is pain. I've yet to meet the person who's big on pain. Yet, most of the time, pain is the only thing that can make us change. We never really move into recovery until we are forced to make a move because we're out of options. God uses three denial busters to get our attention so we'll move.

- 1. God uses crisis.** Has God ever used a crisis to get our attention?
- 2. God uses confrontation.** This is when somebody loves us enough to say, "you're blowing it." You're about to lose everything you have that is precious to you and it's going to cost your family, your health, your job. God uses people to confront us. Pain is like a fire alarm. When it goes off we know something is wrong in our life. If the fire alarm goes off, do you ignore it? Not if you want to live. So why do we ignore the alarms in our life? When our pain alarm goes off, most of us just try to cover up the sound. We cover it up with food. We cover it up with alcohol, or sex. There is a lot out there to cover it up with.
- 3. God uses catastrophe.** This is when the bottom falls out and we lose our families, our finances, our emotions, our family and the list goes on. What happens is that God has to step back and let us fall and feel the full impact of our decisions. "You want to be God, knock yourself out."

Last week we looked at our first step. It was to realize that we're not God and that we are powerless to control our tendency to do the wrong thing and our lives are unmanageable. We called it the reality step. Now for Step 2, the hope step. Step one says, "I'm powerless." Step 2 says, "There is a power out there that we can call on so we don't have to do it all on our own."

**EARNESTLY BELIEVE THAT GOD EXISTS, THAT I MATTER TO HIM, AND THAT HE HAS THE POWER TO HELP ME RECOVER.**

**Hebrews 11:6** "Anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him."

There are three parts to taking step 2 in our road to recovery:

### **ACKNOWLEDGE GOD'S EXISTENCE.**

Most of us don't have a problem with admitting the existence of God. In fact, there are far fewer atheists now than there were 50 years ago. Why? We know a whole lot more about the universe now than we knew 50 years ago. And over and over we see God's truth come out in science and it's had an effect. Fewer and fewer people are willing to come out and say that the universe was just a random accident. In fact, today it takes more faith not to believe in God than it does to believe in God. Where there is a creation, there must be a

creator. Where there is a design, there must be a designer. The odds of that not being true are too staggering to figure. So belief in God is at an all time high.

- > ***Romans 1:20*** **"For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities— his eternal power and divine nature— have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse."**
- > ***Psalms 14:1*** **"The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God,'"**

Which means the real issue isn't whether or not there is a God but "What kind of God is He?" Now the problem is, you can ask ten different people what God is like, and chances are, you're going to get ten different answers. We have some strange ideas about God, and most of us get our ideas about God from watching our parents. If our fathers were abusive, that's how we see God. If our father was aloof and unloving, we see God as aloof and unloving. And what happens is a transformation where we go from being made in God's image to God being made into our image. But my image of God is inconsequential. What is important is what God is really like. Just because we think something, doesn't make it right. Which leads us into our second point.

## **UNDERSTAND GOD'S CHARACTER.**

Until you know what somebody is like, you can't trust that person. Until we know what God is really like, we can't really trust Him. The good thing is that God wants us to know what He's like. That's why he sent Jesus to this earth. Notice this verse.

- > ***Colossians 1:15***. **"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation."**

If we want to know what God is like, we can look at Jesus. Now, having established that as a baseline, what can we learn about God from Jesus that will help us on our road to recovery. Three things:

### **1. GOD KNOWS ALL ABOUT MY SITUATION.**

David writes in the Psalms **"You know how troubled I am; you have kept a record of my tears."** Sometimes we think that nobody knows or cares about us, but God knows and cares. He's kept a record of our tears. Isn't that incredible?

- > ***Psalms 31:7*** **"You saw my affliction and knew the anguish of my soul."** God sees the crisis going on right now.
- > ***Psalms 69:5*** **"... you know how foolish I've been."**

There is no such thing as "going off the record" with God. He is with us 24 hours a day. You may be thinking "that's scary," but think again. God is with us when we sin so God is not shocked by our sins. He knew they were coming and why, before we ever thought about them.

### **2. GOD CARES ABOUT MY SITUATION.**

- > ***Psalms 103:13-14*** **"As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on ...[us]...; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust."**

God knows we aren't super molecular structures. He knows we are made out of dust and that we have our weak points. And God wants to be the father that many never had.

- > ***Jeremiah 31:3*** **God says, "I have loved you with an everlasting love;"**
- How can that be? He loves us on our good days, bad days, on days we praise him and on days when our attitude stinks. He loves us when we are right and he loves us when we're wrong. His love is based on *his* character, not on *our* performance. The Bible tells us "God is love."

- > ***Romans 5:8*** **"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."**

### **3. GOD CAN HELP ME IN MY SITUATION.**

He knows about our situations and he cares about them and, not only that, he's got the

power to change our situations. That's good news. God can change us, and our situation. So we can plug into him. Now, sometimes God changes me. Sometimes he changes my situation. Sometimes he changes both.

> ***Ephesians 1:18-20*** **"I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms."**

Ever find yourself paralyzed by the "I know what I need to do but I just can't get started." The word for that is procrastination. Jesus is saying, "You can't but I can and I've got power enough for both of us." If God can raise Jesus from the dead, then he can raise a dead relationship. He can set us free from our addictions. He can help us close the door on those memories that keep haunting us.

> ***Luke 18:27*** **"Jesus replied, "What is impossible with men is possible with God."** You may be saying, "but you don't know my situation. You don't know where I was last night." Or, "I've tried to change that and it's just impossible." It may be impossible for you but nothing is impossible with God. The point is, the longer we postpone our pain, the further away recovery gets. Sometimes our pain causes us to get stuck in the past and we start analyzing everything that went wrong, and how we reacted to all of it. We call that analysis paralysis. We can't move on because we're stuck in the past. Being like that is like driving a car and looking through the rear view mirror all the time. Now, is our rear view mirror helpful? Sure, it gives us perspective of what's back there but we can't go forward if that's all we're looking at. We all know people who are human wrecks just looking for an intersection. They come out of a relationship beaten up emotionally because they were so stuck with looking in the past that they couldn't get on with the present. And whatever we focus on we tend to repeat.

#### **ACCEPT GOD'S OFFER TO HELP ME.**

It's not enough to believe in God. We've got to embrace his power and that's a whole lot more than just believing.

> ***Philippians 2:13*** **"... for it is God who works in you to will and to act (give you power) according to his good purpose."**

Will power by itself isn't enough. We need God's power. Good intentions aren't enough. We need God's will in our lives and God's power in our lives to help us change. What if we're scared to change? Then tell God you're willing to be made willing. What if I don't want to change? You won't until the pain gets worse than our fear of change. When that happens we invite God into the problem. Now what happens then?

> ***2 Timothy 1:7*** **"For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline."**

We get power in our lives; the power to break habits we can't break by ourselves; the power to free us from the hurts of the past and get on with our lives. Then we get real love. We get to love people and have them love us in return. Then we get self-discipline - who doesn't need that? And when God gives us that we, for the first time, are able to get it all together.

**Let me boil down the principle of the universe for us.** Here it is: Things work best when they're connected to their power source.....Toasters, Coffee Pots, Electric Blankets.....and we, created by design, work best when we are in communion with God. The road to recovery is a tough one because we have to open up to God and to each other. The promise is God will be with us. Look at this last verse:

> ***Isaiah 43:2-3*** **"When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior;"**

# WONDERFUL WOMANHOOD

## LOVE LIFTED ME!!

(Isabel Webster, Wigan)

Several years ago a group of Harding students were visiting Longshoot. We took them to a local beauty spot, Rivington Pike, set high on the Pennines. The pike commands wonderful views for miles around – into Wales, the Lake District, Yorkshire, the coast and it was a beautiful clear day.

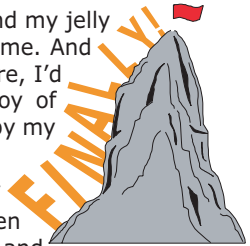
It had been a long time since I'd been farther than the car park but having had a few months remission (from the condition M.E.) I accompanied them on the walk to the foot of the hill. Having walked as far as I was able up to the first rise, I waved them off as they set off up the steep slope. No I wasn't going to experience either the views or the fellowship when they held a devotional at the very top but I'd got further than I'd dared hope and was happy just to wait for their return in such a lovely spot... or so I thought...

After about 50m two of the girls turned back. I thought they had maybe decided it was too steep or had even chosen to keep me company. I was just about to usher them back up the hill but they were having none of it; we were ALL going up the hill - and in my time. Protesting got me nowhere and it was hard to refuse such a kind gesture so we set off very slowly, stopped many times to catch our breath ( well my breath at least!) and to take in the views. Finally the last brow of the hill was before us... the panorama was wonderful and it didn't really matter if I couldn't make it to the very top - did it? Apparently so...

The last lap was SO hard but finally the Pike was there before us. My spirits soared, my wobbly legs strengthened and we were at the very top! There was no sign of the rest of the group as they were on the other side looking west out over the ocean but I'll always remember the shout of joy as we appeared... as well as looks of total amazement from those who knew me best! It was one of the 'high' days of my life – no pun intended! I'd been 'lifted by love'.

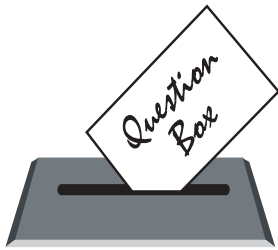
Did I make it down? Barely and quickly!! I started the descent and my jelly legs took over but this time I had the whole group to encourage me. And yes, I relapsed for several days but it didn't matter – I'd been there, I'd done what for me had seemed the impossible and I felt the joy of achievement because two young women I barely knew had stood by my side and selflessly lifted me to a different level.

Sometimes we hear said of a situation, " All we can do is pray." ALL...????? It's the first and most effective thing you can do! When we pray with someone we meet them at the place where they are and through the intercession of faith and love we may be able to lift them to a place where they feel they have the strength to make it on their own. Sometimes there are times when we feel we can't pray. God knows. He understands. That is when we need others to pray for us but I think especially, with us. Do we think to pray WITH one another? I confess that the last person to pray for me in my presence was an Anglican vicar – AND it was over the phone! His wife is a friend of mine and he asked if he could. It felt strange but I was moved – very moved. It felt like a load lifted, a burden shared, an outstretched hand – clichés all – but effective!! Try it. You will both be strengthened by meeting together with God.



**Prayer deals with the impossible; Love makes it happen.**





## BAPTISM

As I begin to write this article the familiar saying, "*Preaching to the converted!*" comes to mind, because I suspect that when I say that this month's subject is '*Baptism*', many readers, especially the older ones, will feel that all the questions that could possibly arise on this subject, were settled a long time ago, and this may well be true.

But I suggest that, unless we constantly reiterate and re-emphasize what the Scriptures teach on Baptism and other important New Testament subjects, we are in danger of losing sight of those truths which were forcefully and clearly proclaimed by the preachers and teachers who first issued the call for the restoration of the New Testament Church.

I sometimes feel that the line which once separated churches of Christ from the denominational world is growing fainter, as we see both congregations and the men who serve them, like the ancient people of God, desiring to become '*like the nations*' round about them. There was a time when the criticism levelled against us was that, in our preaching of the Gospel, we '*made too much of baptism*'. Today I suspect that the pendulum may have swung to the other extreme, with the result that much of the preaching we hear differs very little from what may be heard in denominational services.

It is for this reason that I am happy to deal with several questions about baptism, which I received recently.

### The Fundamental Question.

Some of these questions come from a congregation, which is currently being visited by several people who have expressed an interest in being accepted into fellowship.

The basis of their request is that, although they have been associating with a religious body that does not believe that baptism is necessary to salvation, they, personally, believe that they have been '*scripturally baptized*'; that is, baptized for the forgiveness of sins. In fact, all of the questions that I have received really revolve around and centre in one question of paramount importance. "*What constitutes a true and valid baptism?*"

Well, let me first set out my stall! Many years ago I was taught that true baptism is the baptism; -

1. **of the proper subject;** namely, one who declares his faith in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God.
2. **for the proper purpose;** that is, for the forgiveness of sins and addition to the One Body, the Body of Christ, the Church with all that this involves.
3. **and, in the proper manner;** by immersion in water, to represent death to past life, burial and resurrection with Christ to new life.

Since those distant days I have neither heard nor read anything that would cause me to doubt the soundness of this teaching.

Of course, I realize that the three-point definition of scriptural baptism I have just outlined is unlikely to have been heard in services of the denomination(s) with which the aforementioned enquirers have been associated. But we must never rule out the possibility of sincere religious people arriving at the truth as the result of their own independent study of the Word of God, regardless of what they have been taught by their denominational leaders.

If, when these people were immersed in water, they believed that they were confessing Jesus as Lord and Christ, and were obeying His explicit command to be baptized in order to be saved, I would maintain that theirs was a valid baptism.

## **Not all 'baptism' is 'true baptism'!**

Certainly, there are times when we may unhesitatingly affirm that the ceremony which certain religious bodies call 'baptism' is *not* true baptism. For example, when the *subject* is a helpless baby on whose head, water is *poured or sprinkled*, this cannot be regarded as the baptism of the New Testament Church.

And even if the candidate is an individual old enough to *have a personal faith*, if, when he is *immersed in water*, he believes that baptism is merely '*an act of obedience, subsequent to salvation*', because he has already been '*saved by faith alone*', this, also, is not the baptism practised by the early Christians.

### **Important Points.**

There are several facts, which, I suggest, should always be borne in mind.

1. *The validity of a baptism does not depend on the faith of the one baptising, but on the faith of the one being baptized.* By this I mean that it does not matter what the 'baptiser' believes or teaches about baptism. What he believes is quite irrelevant, because salvation is a matter of *personal faith and personal obedience to Christ*.

2. *A scriptural baptism does not need to be performed by an official 'baptiser'.*

We know that there are religious bodies in which only specially appointed officials are authorized to perform certain ceremonies. Usually, these 'ordained persons' are regarded as 'priests' or 'clergy', and the view of the churches in which they function is that if an 'unauthorized person' performs such ceremonies - (including what they call 'baptism') - the act is invalid.

But there is no scripture, which attributes *special authority* to the one who does the baptizing, no matter what authority is claimed for him. In principle, *anyone* might 'officiate' at a baptism, because, as I have already stated, its validity depends on the personal faith of the candidate. This also means - to put this bluntly - that, in order to be a true baptism, it is not essential that a 'church of Christ preacher' or, 'one of ours' should perform it! Look again at the three points mentioned earlier. The baptiser is not even mentioned. He is merely an expedient; only necessary for the occasion.

3. *Nor does the validity of a baptism depend on the recital of a correct form of words.* It might be reasonably argued that we have turned baptism in to a ceremony more formal than it was in New Testament times. For instance, it is customary for the one who assists the candidate for baptism to say something like: - "Upon the confession of your faith in the Lord Jesus... I now baptize you into the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, for the remission of your sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit".

I say, 'something like this', because the form of words varies from congregation to congregation. Sometimes it may begin: - "*Upon the confession of your faith in the Lord Jesus and upon His authority...*" Or, "*Having confessed your faith in the presence of these witnesses...*"

I think we are all aware that there are also other variations, but it seems to be the generally held view that some sort of formula is essential. But here are a few points about which we might profitably consider.

- i) Is it *really necessary* to use this - or any other - form of words?
- ii) Would a baptism *be invalid* if, after the candidate confessed his faith in the Lord Jesus, he was immersed without the baptiser saying anything at all?
- iii) Does the validity of a baptism depend on *the recitation of the correct formula*?
- iv) If a baptismal formula is essential, *why do we not all use the same one*? And where is *the scripture* that tells us what the formula must be?

## **"Into" and "In"**

When, in the Great Commission (Matt. 28: 18-20), the Lord commanded the baptism of believers, His words, "baptizing them into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit", were not meant to constitute a ritualistic formula which must precede baptism. They are words that explain what happens when one is baptized. Notice, that Jesus commanded baptism 'into', - not 'in' - the Name. The Greek preposition 'eis' is a preposition of movement, indicating a change of position. The words recorded by Matthew constitute the Lord's assurance that, when we are baptized, we enter into a new relationship with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The words declare the consequence of our baptism.

Similarly, when Peter on the Day of Pentecost uttered the familiar words in Acts 2; 38: "*Repent and be baptized, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ*", this was not intended to constitute a baptismal formula. The preposition 'en' is static, and, used in this verse; it is a declaration of the fact that baptism is performed 'in' the name of the Lord Jesus; 'on' His authority. The words reveal *the authority* that lies behind baptism.

Let me put it this way. Scriptural baptism is performed on the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, and brings the obedient believer into a relationship with the entire Godhead - Father, Son and Holy Spirit. If the candidate confesses his faith in the Lord Jesus and understands that baptism is essential to his salvation, his baptism becomes *for the remission of sins and for the free gift (Gr.'dorea) of the Holy Spirit'* even if the baptiser does not expressly state this.

When I obeyed the Gospel, as a boy of 14, there were, at that time, some facts about baptism that were very clear to me. There were truths that I clearly understood. But I have no hesitation in admitting that the significance of my baptism became much clearer and more precious to me as the years passed by, as I came to understand the depth of its meaning and learned to appreciate the spiritual riches that it brought. The one who baptized me did not attempt to list the many consequences that follow baptism. Nor could he have done so anyway! I do not believe that the person has yet been born who, coming to baptism, fully comprehends the significance and the depth of meaning of this apparently simple ordinance that the Lord Himself has made so essential to salvation.

### **Conclusion: Handling a delicate situation.**

But - back to the case of the enquirers mentioned earlier! I recall an occasion when a lady, a member of a certain denomination, began to attend the Gospel service of the church in Corby. After a while she expressed a desire to be received into fellowship. She thought that she had been scripturally baptized, because the church of which she had been a member also practices the immersion of believers.

It was gently pointed out to her that *that* particular religious body teaches that one is saved 'by faith alone', and claims that baptism is merely 'an optional extra'. Therefore, there was a real likelihood that it was only after she had heard Gospel sermons explaining the baptism of the New Testament and had come to understand the truth, that she had convinced herself that this is what she also had received. If this were to be the case, she should consider the possibility that she had not really been scripturally baptized.

We explained to her that we were not in a position to judge in her case, since only God and she knew the facts. If she was fully convinced that she had been scripturally baptized, we must be prepared to accept her baptism. But if, on the other hand, she felt there was any doubt in her mind, she should consider being scripturally baptized. The decision was her own.

We also pointed out that we were not suggesting 're-baptism', because there is no such ceremony. Where salvation is involved, one is either scripturally baptized, or one is not baptized at all. In this lady's case, I am happy to say, after giving the matter careful thought she concluded that she had not really submitted to true, scriptural baptism, and requested to be baptized.

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

# **BROTHER GRAHAM GORTON**

## **AN APPRECIATION OF A WELL LOVED CHRISTIAN.**

Graham Gorton was a saint in Jesus whose life clearly indicated a deep love of his acknowledged Saviour and a resolute determination to be 'fully equipped' for the work of the ministry of the Word in order that he might play his part in the edifying of the church.

Graham was born December 1932, and married Mary in February 1955, a union which lasted forty-nine years until he 'fell asleep in Jesus'. Whenever June and I spent time in the home of Graham and Mary there was a deep mutual understanding that while we were enjoying social fellowship, sooner rather than later, we would be deeply engrossed in fellowship of the word enjoying conversation about those matters which are eternal and which abut onto our destination in eternity. If you visited Graham one could enjoy the whole spectrum of spiritual discussion from the 'milk' to the 'strong meat' of the Word. We miss him with a tangible sadness but rejoice greatly in his imprint indelibly left in the lives of those who knew and loved him.

I first met Graham at Hindley and Abram Grammar School, where as a senior student he was always willing to help the younger pupils to understand the intricate student etiquette of their new school. Even at such an early stage in our relationship I recognised a caring and concerned soul who cared for his fellows. This compassionate caring for his fellows had grown out of an early period spent as a deeply convinced and practising Anglican.

After serving a short period in the Royal Air Force, Graham was employed by the firm of Turner Brothers Asbestos Ltd., at Hindley Green, near Wigan, reaching the ranks of senior management, and for a period moved to Northern Ireland, being an essential manager as a factory was established in Dungannon. Such an onerous position in the industrial world illustrates Graham's occupational ability. It was while he was employed in Hindley Green that Graham came into contact with Robert Brown, a Christian from the church at Hindley. During lunchtime conversations Graham and Robert explored the Word of God. The result of these conversations was that Graham was immersed into the Christ at Hindley. This occurred approximately in 1958 when both Graham and I became Christians, being immersed by Leonard Morgan, our confessions being taken by Stephen Winstanley, the father of Albert Winstanley.

From that time onwards Graham and I grew up in the faith together. We shared open air preaching together, engaged in Bible school teaching, shared platform work and generally aided in the ministry of the church in Hindley. Together with the John Partington family both Graham's family and mine moved to minister to the needs of the small congregations of the churches at Beech Hall, Wigan and Ince in Makerfield. Graham moved to Rochdale and established a church in his home. Latterly he moved to the church in Stretford, living in Chapel en le Frith, becoming a leading and guiding member of that congregation

Graham and Mary enjoy the blessing of three children, David, Fiona and Ian and several grandchildren. Mary and Graham have six grandchildren, Judith, aged seven; Michael, five; Stephen, five and who spent the greater part of his young life living with Graham and Mary; Jack, six; Oliver, three and Samuel a youngster at ten months. The grandchildren doted on Graham and Mary, just as much as grandma and granddad loved and cherished them.

It can be truly said that Graham sought 'the wisdom from above'. In this search he was outstandingly successful. I have no hesitation in saying that Graham's life, which

he lived for the church, was 'pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering and without hypocrisy.' In his search for holiness, righteousness and knowledge Graham was well along the way of high discipleship. Above all he had the ability to 'calm' situations of which he was a part, - 'blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God.' Quietly and with firm intent, with carefully and quietly constructed thoughts, words and actions Graham achieved much for the Lord and for his brothers and sisters in the Christ.

Within the turmoil of today's religious thinking Graham was a place of certainty and solidity. Not averse to changing his mind if shown alternatives to his thinking he examined all the adjuncts of his spiritual life and, in my opinion had reached the stature of the 'spiritual (pneumatikos) man.' The dynamic that motivated this man was a deep certainty that Jesus of Nazareth was his Messiah and a driving willingness to discover truth and to relate his earthly living to the patterns of behaviour so clearly outlined in Scripture. I can only think of one final phrase to append to this appreciation of a dearly beloved Christian, as an epithet to Graham's life:

**"AND 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."**

I was privileged to share a portion of my life with a fellow Christian whose spirit was alive because of righteousness, whose influence on, advice to, support for and involvement with his family, friends, colleagues and brethren was always positive and meant to improve the lot of all his relationships with people. Graham loved the Christ and showed that love to his fellows. He is, and will be, heartachingly missed but we rejoice in the example of the life of a 'spiritual man'.

**Bro Ernest Makin**



**What do you think?**

I recently received a letter from a Christian who would like to have some scriptural advice on despair and stress. He refers to Jeremiah, Psalms and Job as reference points. Can anyone help? Have you coped with despair and won through? Are those who say Christians should never feel despair and stress correct or is a perfectly natural state for Christians at times in their lives?

Maybe you have personal experience that you can share or have conducted a study of one of the books above that can offer help to our brother. If so please send your contributions.

(Editors note: My previous attempts to generate responses under this feature have been extremely unsuccessful. Don't leave it to someone else. The same lack of response will result in this feature being dropped!)

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

# Balaam's Ways (7)

(Brian J Boland)

In today's society addressing Balaam's weakness of arrogance with its sister pride is one of the most challenging we have to conquer. But unless we do, we are in danger of losing our place in heaven. In his third oracle he says **"The oracle of Balaam the son of Beor, the oracle of the man whose eye is opened, the oracle of him who speaks the words of God, who sees the vision of the Almighty falling down with his eyes uncovered" [Num. 24.2-4 ESV].**

Let us compare the tone of this with that of Daniel when he went before king Nebuchadnezzar to explain his forgotten dream. The king said to him "are you able to make known to me the dream". Daniel replied **"there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries and he has made known to Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days. Your dream and visions in your head" [Dan 2.26-28 ESV]** he then added **"but as for me, this mystery has been revealed to me, not because of any wisdom that I have more than all living, but.... in order that you may know thoughts of your mind [v30].** Note the humble tone of Daniel compared to the bombastic style of Balaam. Over 1000 years earlier Joseph was brought before Pharaoh to interpret his dream but Joseph said to him **"That is beyond me; it is God who will respond to Pharaoh's welfare" [Ge.41.16 Torah (Stones)]** Then in closing Joseph tells Pharaoh, **"God has revealed to Pharaoh what he must do". [Ge.41.25].** This humility is a mark of a man of God. We are told, **"Now the man Moses was very meek more than all the men on the face of the earth [Ge.12.3 ESV].** At the end of Job's trial, Job replied to God's questions, "Behold I am insignificant; what can I reply to thee?" [Job 40.3 NAS] He was then instructed to **"bring low the proud".**

Nebuchadnezzar after his dream as being the greatest king in history had another dream to warn him of the dangers of becoming too proud, leading Daniel to warn him that he would be brought low if he did not resort to righteousness and showing mercy to the poor. [Dan 4.27] A year later as he was praising the greatness of himself he became mentally deranged and ate grass like cattle [Dan 4.33-]. His reason later returned and then gave homage to God **"Now I, Nebuchadnezzar praise and honour the King of heaven, for all his works are right and his ways just; and those who walk in pride he is able to humble" [Dan 4.37 ESV].** Balaam found to his cost that his pride was to bring him down. He boasted his eyes were open, but he had not seen the angel of the Lord the three times which had been seen by the donkey, until the Lord opened his eyes [Nu. 22]. His confession that he had sinned [Nu.22.34] brought no change in lifestyle as later he proclaimed that when seeing the vision of the almighty that his eyes were uncovered [Nu.24.4].

How different to when Daniel saw a vision of a man dressed in linen with a face the appearance of lightning he fell onto the ground face downwards then, when being comforted he being afraid, trembled. But he was then told not to be afraid because he had set his heart on understanding and humbling himself [Dan.10.10-12]. The same fear came upon Moses when he turned aside to see the burning bush causing him to hide his face, as he was afraid to look at God [Ex.3.6]. When the future parents of Samson, Manoah and his wife, saw an angel of the Lord they immediately fell on the earth with their faces to the ground. Ezekiel's response was the same [Ez. 1.28] as was "all the people of Israel" [Lev.9.24] When Peter, James and John saw the Lord being transfigured and seeing Moses and Elijah they "fell on their faces and were terrified [Mt. 17.6 ESV] But Balaam had no such inhibitions HIS EYES WERE UNCOVERED!! Even when seeing the vision of the Almighty [Nu.24.4,16 ESV]. The Old Testament position is summed up in Proverbs- **" Everyone who is arrogant in heart is an abomination to the Lord; be assured, he will not go unpunished [Prov.16.5 ESV]**

## News and Information

### *Ghana Appeal*

We continue to receive letters of appreciation thanking donors for their help. We appreciate your contributions and are careful in allocating funds for the optimum benefit. The result has been the saving of lives through medical aid and souls through spreading the Word of God. The wife of a prominent Church leader is amongst those being treated for serious illness. As well as preaching in new areas to establish fresh congregations, brothers travel to teach established churches, helping them to grow. The results are very encouraging with more baptisms being reported – each one a person saved from condemnation.

We appeal on behalf of the elderly occupants of four homes that have been destroyed by fire. Not only are these brethren now homeless but all their possessions are lost. Others have taken them into their homes but help is needed for a permanent solution.

The government scheme to provide boreholes for water supply in remote villages at 10% of the cost has been cancelled and will be replaced by a pipeline leading to a storage tank. As this will not reach the village in question for 3 years, and as pure water is essential for health, our brethren themselves have begun boring. They have sent a photograph of the work done to date.

People in remote villages depend on their own produce for survival and so such a borehole, as well as supplying our brethren would also be greatly appreciated by their neighbours (Gal 6:10) but before proceeding we are seeking further clarification. Those wishing to help please make cheques payable to: **Dennyloanhead Church of Christ Ghana Fund** and send to the treasurer: **Mrs Janet Macdonald, 12 Charles Drive, Larbert, Falkirk, Stirlingshire. FK5 3HB. Tel: 01324 562480**

## Baptism

### **Dundee, Scotland**

Rejoice with us over a new addition into the family of God here in Dundee, Scotland.

On 21st July about 25 members of the Church gathered at Glenrothes to witness the baptism of Scott Ellington. Scott has been attending church for the past couple of months and participating in a Bible study. Scott is 20 years old and has been through a lot in the last year, losing both his parents. He found a new family, a new Father, and a new Saviour. We pray for Scott as he begins his new life in Christ. Please remember him in your prayers.

**Alastair Ferrie, Dundee.**

## News from America - the Frank & Ashurst families

Many readers will remember with great affection HB and Lavern Frank who ministered in the Wigan and Aylesbury areas many years ago and now live and work for the Lord in Georgia, USA.

Lavern recently suffered a stroke and requests the prayers of the Churches in Britain. (I understand that Lavern's recovery is very slow – Editor)

Paul & Lisa Ashurst live with HB and Lavern and Stan & Lindy Frank (ex – Crawley), live in the next county. Danielle has visited twice and Molly plans to visit from her home in Germany.

Paul & Lisa recently married two daughters. Leigh married Daniel Roberts, a preacher from Alabama. Monique married John Demas, a network technician, at the end of a mission trip to Blessings Hospital, Malawi, Africa.

**Received by email from the Ashurst/Frank family**

## Change of Address

### Eastwood, Notts.

Adrian & Gill Lamb and family  
59 Chewton Street  
Eastwood, Nottingham, NG16 3GY

All mail and correspondence for the Church at Eastwood to be addressed to: Church of Christ Eastwood, Secretary (address as above). Phone numbers are unchanged.

Email: [cofceastwood@aol.com](mailto:cofceastwood@aol.com)  
Adrian's personal email address is: [adrianlimb@aol.com](mailto:adrianlimb@aol.com)

## Coming Events

### Kentishtown, London

October 2nd and 3rd, 2004

#### ANNIVERSARY MEETINGS

*Speaker:* Geoff Daniell (Bristol)

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

6.00pm **Gospel Meeting**

Sunday, 3rd – **Normal Services**

### Newtongrange, Scotland

Saturday, October 9th, 2004

#### ANNUAL SOCIAL

*Speaker:* Graeme Pearson,  
Dunfermline

Meeting will start at 1.00 pm

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

### Peterhead, Scotland

2nd & 3rd October 2004

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

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

6pm Evening meeting

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

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

Please contact: 01779 473046.

### Stretford, Manchester

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

**Saturday, September 25th 2004**

*Speaker:* Ian Davidson, Motherwell, who will also speak

On Sunday morning 26th September at 11.00 am

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

**Saturday 23rd October 2004**

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

**Saturday 20th November 2004**

*Speaker:* John Morgan, Hindley

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