

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 **Thankfulness for God's eternal providence**

It is hardly fashionable within 'Church of Christ' circles to praise the Archbishop of Canterbury, but I have to confess to being impressed by the Archbishop's sermon at the Armistice Day Remembrance Service held back in November 2009 in St. Paul's cathedral. I caught a short passage of the sermon whilst driving and was sufficiently interested in what he was saying to search out the full text of his address on the internet the following day. The themes that he spoke about in the context of the remembrance of the fallen and wounded in

conflict are themes that cause me a lot of thought, and no few problems, in trying to truly understand our relationship with God.

Revelation and faith

In his address the Archbishop was essentially trying to bring some rational thought, on this occasion in particular in the context of the 2 World Wars of the 20th century, to the much-asked question: "What was God doing to allow so many people to suffer so much?" Whenever tragedy strikes in either isolated or large-scale circumstances it is almost inevitable that this question will be asked even though the actual form of the question might have different emphases. It is also one of those great irrationalities that the people who often ask this question are those that would deny the existence of God! It has always been a mystery how people can question the motives of someone that they believe doesn't exist!

Before I reproduce and comment upon some extracts from the Archbishop's address it is probably only fair that I make clear some of my own views about God's activity in the world so that each reader can put my further comments into that context. Without doubt God remains the omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent Being who is revealed to us in scripture. In those respects we have the assurance of God's power, wisdom and presence in the world and that, together with the sacrifice of Jesus, is the basis of the Christian's hope, not just in this world, but in the eternal world to come. He is also a providential

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God who has fitted the world for the physical habitation of mankind and spiritually has "granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness", an "escape from corruption" and the opportunity to "become partakers of the divine nature". We do well to really let the significance of those words excite us! God has provided us too with instruction and advice as to the behaviours and attitudes that work best within His creation and provided us with His own indwelling presence in the Spirit.

On the other hand God, in His wisdom, has also placed a huge amount of responsibility into the hands of mankind – responsibility to order his affairs for the physical well-being of all and the responsibility for making his own decisions about spiritual matters and relationship with God in the revealed knowledge of His majesty and the eternal provision that has been made for us.

Why does God allow...?

The "Why does God allow this to happen" question (Why does God allow wars, people to die, children to suffer etc) only arises with any validity if God is considered to be an interventionist God who is prepared to, and likely to, step in at times of personal, national or international problems or crises and prevent the worst excesses of human life from occurring. If God is an interventionist, then it is perfectly valid to consider why one event, tragic or otherwise, might be allowed to happen by God whilst another is prevented from occurring. Now I know that the immediate response to this proposition will be that it is not within the scope of mankind to question or challenge the ways of God; that God has the sovereign authority to allow or disallow what He wills and that 'His ways are not our ways'; that if we try to understand the rationality of God's actions we effectively reduce Him to our level and try to build our relationship with Him on our powers of reason rather than faith. Many of these thoughts arise as we read the events of the Old Testament though it does seem to me that even then God's interventions were not to 'solve problems' but more to demonstrate the effects of ignoring God or being disobedient to His will.

If God isn't an interventionist in the sense of 'micro-managing' the affairs of mankind, then the "Why does God allow .." question simply doesn't arise and we must conclude that what God 'allows' is for events to unfold for good or evil in a natural way; that now having made His full revelation to mankind through the incarnation of Jesus, the inspired words of Scripture and the lives of faithful men and women He expects mankind, with that continuing legacy, to 'work out' his relationship with God in a world in which both good and evil play their part. People can, and regrettably do, ignore God; some think they know better, and others simply don't know or care what God says. Why does God allow people, Christians included, to make stupid and irresponsible mistakes that sometimes have tragic consequences? Well one view might be that whilst He has made all necessary provision and revelation – He has also placed responsibility and accountability in our own hands. Christians of course should take decisions prayerfully drawing on the knowledge that we have of God's will for us and in the context of the providential care that God has bestowed on us as we discussed earlier.

A God to solve all problems...?

In his address Dr Williams spoke of the psychological and emotional damage that the First World War in particular inflicted upon both nations and individuals and of the loss of 'human purpose and human meaning' as a result of that conflict. He said: "The generation that lived through the War was a generation both literally depleted by mass slaughter and depleted or diminished in another way by the loss of so much confidence and aspiration." One of the passages of the address that then caught my attention was when he spoke about the effect of the conflicts on people's attitudes towards God. He said: "The war shattered so many illusions for those who suffered in the trenches and further afield, as well as on the Home Front. But it

also sorted out the wheat from the chaff, and built some powerful moral clarities. And some, at least, of those who tried to make sense of where God had been in all this realised that losing the safe, problem-solving God who protected nations and empires might itself be a gift, a moment of truth that brought the reality of God closer, recognised or not."

It is conceivable of course that in a conflict situation both sides of the same conflict could be appealing to the same God for both protection and 'success', however that is defined. God is appealed to 'protect our nation' or our values – from both sides! However it is the comment about the loss of the 'safe, problem-solving God who protected nations and empires' that had me thinking. Is this a trap that we fall into even now as Christians? Is it a perception of God that we have allowed and enabled those without a faith to slip into with our appeals to God for 'help' in every circumstance of life? Is our view of God that all we have to do is present our 'prayers and supplications' (very often our wish list) to Him and our benevolent and problem-solving God will simply deal with all of the nasty issues that confront us and allow us to live pain and stress-free lives? We need the assurance of His presence, but do we really expect him to solve every problem? I would suggest, with all humility that perhaps we have spent too long imploring God to deal with situations, (which are of man's making and not God's) and solve our perceived problems and too little time simply expressing our heartfelt thanks to God for the fact that He has, already, through His Son, dealt with the most pressing and life-threatening affliction of mankind – that being, of course, that most suffocating and deadly affliction of sin.

In a further passage of his speech the Archbishop made reference to the writings of a military chaplain: "Geoffrey Studdert-Kennedy, the charismatic military chaplain universally known as 'Woodbine Willie', was one of those who tried to make sense of this. What he wrote can still shock and challenge in deep ways. One of his meditations on 'God and Prayer' begins by evoking a scene in the trenches: 'I wish that chap would chuck his praying. It turns me sick. I'd much rather he swore like the sergeant.' So is prayer useless? Is God truly absent and powerless? Studdert-Kennedy simply answers that prayer won't save us from suffering any more than it saved Christ from his cross. But it is the only thing that makes us able to fight against evil in the only way that will actually transform the situation as Christ did – by selfless compassion, with all the risk that carries.

In all his work, in his sermons, his meditations, his astonishing poems, so many of them cast in the voice of the ordinary soldier in the trenches, full of protest and apparent blasphemy, Studdert-Kennedy argues against the bland, problem-solving God. His commitment is to the God who is discovered in the heart of your own endurance and pain – not a solution, not a Father Christmas or a fairy godmother, but simply the one who holds your deepest self and makes it possible for you to look out on the world without loathing and despair."

Now if, in talking about 'the God who is discovered in the heart of your own endurance and pain', Studdert-Kennedy means that you effectively create your own 'god' with whatever characteristics you want him to have, then of course we can have little sympathy with that point of view. However it must also be true that whilst God is unchanging, and unchangeable at the whim of our imagination, there is no such thing as a homogeneous 'experience' of God, just as there is no 'one size fits all' experience of life. Our relationship with God is deeply personal and in that respect He is the omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent Being who not only holds our deepest self, but also understands our deepest motivations and intents.

Thankfulness for God's providence

When considering God's interventions into, or directions of, the affairs of mankind or of individual Christians, I am very conscious of the deeply held convictions of many people and it is certainly not my intention to disrespect the spiritual conviction or experience of any

Christian. I know that many of you feel that God has 'moved you' to work in a particular location or sphere of activity. Others feel that God has led them to the right career or job or to the right partner. I do though become very uneasy when Christians have recounted that events have conspired to prevent them, for example, from boarding an aeroplane that subsequently crashed with total loss of life, or taking a car journey that had tragic consequences. Luck, fate or divine intervention? And what of the person who replaced the fortunate non-traveller and lost his or her life as a result?

Whether God is an interventionist or a non-interventionist, whether He is an observer of our lives or the master puppeteer, or something in between, what I do believe is that we need to raise our horizons beyond seeing God as the problem solver or 'fairy godmother' figure. Of course we are invited to make our prayers and supplications known to God, but let us not make those prayers and supplications into a 'wish list' of outcomes that we want God to deliver to us. Rather let our emphasis be to give thanks to God for the remarkable things that he has already done for us. And let us always bear in mind when we approach God, (and if you take nothing else away from this article please take this thought), that in His eternal providence, with the grace and love that define His Fatherhood, He **has** already dealt with and determined that all of the barriers that once existed to our hope of an eternal inheritance should be removed. Satan **has** been defeated; the price of our redemption **has** been paid; the down payment on our salvation **is** already in God's hands; the victory over sin and death **has** been won; our eternal home **is** prepared and waiting for us. God does not need to constantly provide us with more to 'prove' his love for us because what He has already done is providence indeed – and more than we could ever imagine or deserve. And the real blessing is that the best is yet to come!

When Paul wrote to the Christians at Colossae, he told them that in his prayers to God, he thanked God for their faith, their love for the brethren and their love in the Spirit. Paul then expresses to them what he prays for on their behalf, and I think we will do well, on behalf of each other to echo the prayer of Paul. His prayer is not for material comfort or wealth, not for continuous good health, not for a divine answer or instant solution to every one of life's problems. As I bring the privilege of being editor of the Scripture Standard for a brief period to a close, I hope that we can join together with Paul in expressing our true desire for one another and our true hope: **"And so, from the day that we heard of it (the faith and love of the brethren at Colossae - Ed), we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, to lead a life worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in Whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."**

I would like to offer my heartfelt thanks for having had the opportunity to edit the Scripture Standard, and offer my apologies for the inconsistency of issues these last 12 months or so. It would have been impossible to produce the magazine at all without the support of John Kneller, Ian Davidson, Frank Worgan, Ruth Nisbet and Pat Moncrieff – theirs has been a labour of love and we owe them all a great debt of gratitude. Thank you all. Those that have provided stimulating articles for publication, Rose Payne, John Diggle, Ian Grant and others, you our readers and our printers have been true partners. Having undertaken the role of editor for a short time I am genuinely in awe of the previous editors and contributors who each served for so long. I would like to wish every success to Bro Allan Ashurst and his team as they prepare to the magazine forward. Robert Marsden.

Thinking Out Loud

Ian S. Davidson: Motherwell

ART AND MEANING

Paul Cézanne, the famous artist, will always be associated with Aix - en - Provence in France. At one time he was regarded by people in the city as an odd individual. Today his name is everywhere in Aix and because of him tourists visit from all over the world. I can tell you that he is no longer regarded as odd.

Cézanne was born in Aix in 1839 and died there in 1906. His art has had, and still has, a huge influence on many painters throughout the world. He has had a great influence on me and I grew to admire his work when I took Art as a Higher subject at Secondary school. I soon learned that he was a Post-Impressionist artist, as were Vincent Van Gogh and Paul Gauguin. Somehow Cézanne's work struck a chord with me and we have been in harmony ever since those happy school days in the 1960's. It was a special thrill for me to visit recently his studio in Aix and to hear a wonderful lecture on him delivered by a very capable young French girl.

FRANCIS SCHAEFFER

By the time I had left school I had studied the artists known as the Impressionists and Post-Impressionists quite extensively. However, it was a radio programme I heard from Monaco in Millport, Scotland that was to help me understand what many of these artists were really about. The programme featured Francis Schaeffer and he was obviously a religious man and someone who dealt with modern subjects in an exciting and different way. I knew nothing of him, but, consequently, sought out some of his books in London. Eventually, I managed to purchase all of his works, which, incidentally, I recently re-read.

Schaeffer speaks of a "line of despair" in the modern world and dates it to 1890 in Europe and 1935 in the United States. Below this line are various disciplines. The first step below the line is Philosophy. Then come Art, Music, General Culture and Theology. In Philosophy it was Hegel (1770-1831) who opened the door into the line of despair and in Art it was the Impressionists. He writes: "There are three men who stand out above them all. They are Van Gogh (a Dutchman), Gauguin and Cezanne (Frenchmen). Each was a genius; they were very real human men, and each produced pictures that show their genius as artists. However, as we enjoy these pictures as art, appreciating their composition, their use of colour and all other things to admire, we must also see their place in the second step in the 'line of despair'. They are the three pillars of modern art. In each case they tried to find a universal in their art as Leonardo da Vinci had tried many centuries before them. What the philosopher was trying to do within the scope of the whole universe, they now tried to do on a limited scale on their canvases. As they crossed the threshold of the line of despair, they began a desperate search to find a universal that would give them back reality, something more than just particulars. They were seeking to express a form and a freedom which would be valid in the scope of their discipline, art."

Both Van Gogh and Gauguin died in despair, but not Cézanne. Schaeffer writes: "As far as we know, tragedy never caught up with him. He died, as far as I have been able to discover, without ever coming to the conclusion of despair." The young lecturer in Aix informed us that, deep- down, Cézanne was a religious man and so that might be why he was different from the rest.

Provence is also associated with Van Gogh and Gauguin and that is why I also visited Saint Remy and Arles while in that region of France. For me, Van Gogh has been a

lifetime study too, ever since I read a book featuring his letters to his brother Theo.

MEANING

People today seek for meaning in their lives through philosophy or art or music or whatever. Sadly, few turn to the Bible for guidance and help. Humanism has driven people away from reality with the result that many are left with only their finite expressions. Universals or absolutes are rejected. Relativism is everywhere and so everywhere there are problems. Societies throughout the world are struggling against this falsehood. Make no mistake about it; relativism leads to despair and disaster.

I think I can now see where the likes of Cézanne, Van Gogh and Gauguin were coming from. I think too I can see where Jesus is coming from. My understanding of Jesus and His teaching I place in far higher regard than anything I have gleaned from Art or Music or Philosophy. Jesus, I believe, is Truth, Absolute Truth, and He has revealed Total Truth for the salvation of mankind. After all, Jesus was not only human, He was also Divine. Jesus could have spoken about many other subjects while on earth, but his thoughts and actions were concerned with saving men and women from sin, Satan and eternal death. I have no problem when it comes to "meaning" with Jesus. He said what He meant and meant what He said – always. He truly told us and showed us what life is all about. And Life is all about God and His Son who is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

People are able to create great art or music or technology because they are created in the image of God. The constitution of the human being is body, soul and spirit. The spirit is what makes us different from the animals. "The spirit is the highest and noblest part of man." So wrote Martin Luther. Someone else wrote: "The spirit is that part of man which makes him able to reason and to think, and which makes him kin to God; it is through his spirit that man can receive a message from God, and can enter into fellowship with God who is spirit."

We were created for God's pleasure. In this life we must not live to please ourselves, but to please Him. Yes, there is much in the world to enjoy, but everything has to be kept in perspective. To lose sight of the real purpose of life and the true goal of life can result in despair. I weep for so many in this world (some quite brilliant people) who have lost their way. They have been taken in by the zeitgeist, the spirit of the age, and not submitted themselves to the Spirit of God. They have elevated the creativity, attainments and wisdom of man above the creativity, attainments and wisdom of God. It is God who has given us the world with all its beauty. Without His works there would be no human accomplishments. Yet, so often the good Lord is not given the credit He so justly deserves. Cézanne painted the famous Mont Sainte-Victoire outside Aix scores of times, but it was God who put the mountain there in the first place!

CONCLUSION

We read in the book of Revelation: "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created" (4:11). So life on earth is meaningful, not meaningless. There is a purpose to human existence. We are not here by chance, but design. Everyone who sees a painting of Mont Sainte – Victoire can safely say there is an artist behind it. Yet, why is there not an artist behind the real thing? God is the supreme Artist, Architect and Designer! For example, His landscapes worldwide are wonderful. They have a beauty that is breathtaking. But, the big question is, do we enhance the landscapes or spoil them? Are we living in harmony with nature and, above all, in harmony with its Creator? Is the Artist of all artists pleased to include us in the overall picture? And will He welcome all of us one day into the perfect world to come? Will we all be a part of the eternal picture in heaven? I pray that this will be so.

DO NOT BE CONFORMED TO THIS WORLD

(Continued from Issue 3)

Ian Grant (Corby)

Every culture, and ours is no exception, will have an impact upon those living in that society; it will change people's thinking in ways that can be identified, yet in ways that we may not notice. This means that there are aspects of our culture that ought to be viewed with caution and even great concern, when it comes to faithfully living the Christian life. For example, the remarkable success of marketing can influence our readiness to learn from the scriptures in unexpected ways. To be more precise, we ought to view with some scepticism the world's idea that big is better and that numbers are the answer. Even in the market today, size alone is no guarantee of success for large companies are not immune from failure. Not that there is anything wrong with big numbers in themselves for the more who choose to serve Christ the better, and the greater the improvement there will be in this country as a whole for 'Righteousness exalts a nation' (Prov. 14:34).

SUCCESS-ORIENTED

In the modern business environment the success of many businesses is dependant upon meeting ever increasing sales targets, and until the present credit crunch, businesses have been extraordinarily successful. We have seen small companies grow into multi-nationals such that their products are now household names in countries throughout the world. As such they enjoy economies of scale that give them the edge over their competitors and they continue to grow. A significant factor in that growth is their ability to successfully market their products.

Where all around us success is measured in terms of numbers, then in the Church we can expect to be influenced by such thinking. As small churches are the norm in this country, and we learn of huge denominational churches overseas, we can begin to equate success with large numbers and importantly also, failure with small numbers. (What we can easily overlook is that in America, figures from the denominational world show that the majority of churches are in fact quite small - with fewer than 100 members.) In such an environment, where the Church is not growing all that well, we can expect that a marketing culture can have an appeal. After all if it works in the commercial world, why not in the Church? And the mega-churches show that it can work.

DOES IT WORK?

Where marketing is king, one of the outcomes is that truth tends to be stifled or even silenced. In a society where technology is so crucial, and the focus is on what works, the question of right or wrong all too often gets overlooked or even ignored. Governments are constantly having to bring in new laws in order to regulate company practices, because it is considered that unfair advantage has been taken of the consumer. Today, the bonus culture in the banks where failure is rewarded is in the news. This is to say nothing of the examples of outright dishonesty that have come to light in recent times. It is not as if the companies have no idea as to what is right and wrong and what is fair and what is unfair, and only governments understand. Making profits can get in the way of making ethical decisions. Success is no indication of the presence of truth and indeed may point in the opposite direction.

For some time now we have seen examples on television of it being argued that some medical research ought to go ahead because of the benefits that are likely to flow from the research. The well-worn phrase is that 'it could potentially help millions of people'. Whether it is ethical is not the question being asked. I saw one example where it was argued that it would be unethical not to do the research; that was nothing less than pure sophistry.

That such thinking has trickled down to everyday life can be seen in the practice of not telling someone that they are dying. The usual justification for this is that it is kinder to the one who is facing death. What this means in practice is that the family knows what is happening and so they all live out a lie, pretending that the individual is going to get better. While not driven by commercial gain, clearly this is not ethical. But it works in that it helps the living to avoid the unpleasant. At the same time, it fails the dying for they are deprived of the opportunity to sort out their affairs. But they are not around to complain.

Yet another example was on the television recently where it was reported that in India boys are highly prized and girls cost a dowry, and so many girls are aborted. It was claimed that it is not an ethical issue but a consumer choice.

The same thinking tends to creep into all areas of life including the Church; what works and is efficient is seen as ethical. The result can be that if large numbers are achieved then it is seen as working and so it must be right. It is just a way of saying that the end justifies the means. Once we believe that numbers are the measure rather than what is ethical, Bible study becomes less important for scripture makes ethics a priority. It may not be spelt out in people's minds so clearly, but the practice of having success decide what is ethical will push scripture to the sidelines.

ANOTHER EXAMPLE

Not that long ago the bus ministry was seen as the way for churches to grow. A good number of children were bussed in every Sunday from around the local neighbourhood to attend Bible classes, and without a doubt the numbers in some cases were large. Thankfully, the endeavour did save many souls and much good was achieved in many different ways through this outreach.

Nonetheless, in some situations any criticism of the work at the time was met by pointing to the large numbers of new children being brought into contact with the Church. You can hardly argue with success! This was a particularly pointed response to criticism as evangelism in the Church was generally very much on the wane.

However, that in the long run it was not the success that was expected can be seen in that bussing in children has almost disappeared. For example, churches did not grow as was anticipated for as the children grew up many simply stopped attending. For many parents it was little more than a child-care programme and for the children it was a fun experience. That it exposed many to the Church and that was their only contact with the Church is a fact that should not be minimised.

In practical terms it turned out that the manpower to run such a huge endeavour was beyond many of the churches. Some saw the problem and adjusted their efforts accordingly, but for some the demand for workers was so great that people were sidelined from their own Bible study in order to cope with the numbers. This at times included new Christians. After all, no great biblical knowledge was necessary to participate in the programme and there was lots of work to be done. And there are always people who prefer activity to study.

In such a demanding undertaking, people working together under pressure inevitably tread on each other's toes. Some, not having studied the scriptures to learn how to treat each other in loving ways, or how to deal with conflict in a biblical way, just exacerbated the problem. Just when brethren needed to learn about how to get on with each other, when working under pressure and so closely with others, they were cut off from the source of that knowledge by not being in Bible classes.

Further, the logistics of it were such that people were simply worn out by all the work. As people exhausted themselves some fell away and others remained faithful, but having got into the habit of not attending Bible study, they did not pick it up again.

It is important to remember that what I have described is not true of all bus ministries, and I have simply used the bus ministry to illustrate a point; that an over emphasis on numbers can be a mistake and result in brethren missing out on Bible study and even sermons in some cases.

MEGA-CHURCHES

That was the past, but what of the present? Today there are some well-known denominational mega-churches in the USA. Their attendance figures are very impressive and at a time when we are not making a significant impact upon the world, we can find ourselves attracted to their methods and thinking that the success of the Church is to be measured in numbers. Their ubiquitous books are full of ways that they use to reach the lost in large numbers. Read their books, that are often best sellers, and it is easy to yearn for such growth where we are. Admittedly, a more modest growth for we are not so naive as to expect to grow churches that big.

It turns out that these mega-churches have taken the techniques that have made the modern commercial world flourish and used them to grow large churches. Along with successful businesses their market strategy is to identify the demands of the market place and respond to those demands. They learn the consumer's appetites and expectations, assess the consumers perceived needs, and provide what the consumer wants. The idea is that if you give people what they want they will attend. In a sense the consumer is sovereign.

CONSUMER IS SOVEREIGN?

But this is using marketing methods that are quite inappropriate for the Church. For a business to be successful consumers must be given what they want. In order to expand, businesses cater to people's wants and not necessarily their needs. They do not differentiate as long as their product sells. The problem is that the majority of needs are really no more than self-indulgence, and self-indulgence is what many businesses promote. Indeed, one could say that self-indulgence has become the world's gospel; but that is contrary to the genuine gospel (Matthew 16:24-25).

Then there is the issue of what people see as their needs. In our consumer oriented and self-obsessed society, people want self-understanding, self-improvement and something that will help them reach their goals in life. Many are looking for helpful hints for better marriages, or have problems with stress, or with loneliness, or a lack of fulfilment, or what they think is low self-esteem. They want these to be resolved. To help achieve this they think that they must discover themselves, and come to know who they are; they must get in touch with themselves. Further they want to know how to master the self to be able to reach their full potential so that they can be successful. The emphasis is on the self and the therapeutic. Pop-psychology with its focus on needs promotes such thinking.

God, through the scriptures explains just who we are and how to live a full life. However, the gospel is not about health, happiness and worldly success and not about meeting people's perceived needs. Instead, it makes it plain that the real answer to life's problems requires giving up being self-centred. Not surprisingly, that is not a message that is welcomed.

Being told that we are sinners and that being a Christian includes having to deny oneself is nothing like as attractive as being told that the pain you have caused and the pain you suffer are not your fault. To be told that you do not have to feel guilty, for you are not responsible for your actions, and so you can feel good about yourself is attractive. A self-centred generation, that lives life for today and has come to expect to have what it wants, right away, is not attracted to a message that requires sacrifice and service today, and is, in their view, nothing more than pie in the sky. In the words of the chant: they want what they want and they want it now.

THERAPY TAKES OVER AND THEOLOGY DIES

If it is believed that psychology has the answers then why study the scriptures that major in how we are to behave in our relationships with each other and those in society? When the therapeutic takes over real theology dies in the Church as the hard work of relating scripture to life is abandoned in favour of a more attractive message that is on offer. When sin and salvation, guilt and grace are replaced by personal problems, secular counselling and therapeutic practices, Bible study falls by the wayside as almost irrelevant. In an effort to remain relevant, sermons and lessons can become no more than the latest offerings from pop-psychology. Instead of sermons being about the cross, they are about us.

We must not overlook the fact that when businesses fail to provide what consumers believe that they need, the consumers will take their business elsewhere, as the demise of long established stores demonstrates. When churches, built on meeting needs, fail to meet the perceived needs of those attending they too will find that people will stop attending. This was an element with the bus programme where parents used it simply as a baby-sitting service until it was no longer needed.

The idea that the audience is sovereign is simply not true in the Church. Where do people get the idea that the purpose of the church is to meet people's perceived needs? The customer is not always right. Paul writing to Timothy warned him that the day would come when brethren would have their own ideas about what they wanted to hear. Timothy was not to go down that track (2 Tim. 4:1-6). Regardless of what the brethren thought that they wanted to hear, Timothy was to preach the word, whether or not it would keep the brethren happy. Paul did not think that the consumer was king.

ONE GENUINE NEED

That these mega-churches and their books are having a direct influence upon us can be seen in the fact that brethren have gone out and taken a survey of what the people in the community want from the Church. The community is asked what the Church can do to meet their needs.

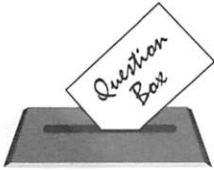
People are sinners and, as such, are under the wrath of God (Rom. 1:18). This means that the one genuine need that people have is for reconciliation to God. The good news that we have to offer people is that lost sinners can be forgiven and reconciled to God. Sadly, many people are not interested in such a message. However, should we choose to change the message and teach something different it will no longer be the gospel (Gal. 1: 6-10). Appropriately, Paul concluded: "For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a servant of Christ." NKJV).

OTHER PROBLEMS

To cater to what people want, a big church with a big staff is necessary to provide such things as child care facilities, support groups, counselling and convenient car parking. Experience with the bus programme should pour cold water on the notion that this is a great option.

In our modern world big programmes require big budgets. When money becomes a concern it is easy to see how not upsetting people who give generously can easily become an issue. Marketing the Church will soon demand that negative subjects, that might upset some, be avoided and even that specific sins be tolerated. It is hardly surprising then that doctrine can, without difficulty, end up being played down and Bible knowledge can be considered not to be all that important. If the criterion for success is bums on seats the result can be that assemblies can end up being more entertaining than edifying.

We ought to be aware that studies have shown that churches that water down doctrine and adopt worldly values go into decline.



QUESTION: Some Practical Questions of Faith



The following reply was sent to one whose letters suggested that he is young in the faith, and the questions he asked may, perhaps, remind the older ones among us that we often take many things for granted and assume that young Christians know more than they do. Frank.

Dear Brother

Thank you for your questions. Because I am able to answer only one question a month in the "Scripture Standard" I am taking this opportunity writing to you personally. I hope that you appreciate that I cannot possibly take the time to answer the 20 or more questions contained in the letters, and that my answers to the more important ones will necessarily be brief.

1. Why are married Christians stronger and more dedicated than single Christians?

The simple answer is that God Himself decided that Man should not remain alone, and provided Adam with a wife. Jesus also said that a man should leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife. The husband and wife provide for each other's needs, care for one another and support one another. See Ephesians 5:22-33.

2. Did Israel receive the Holy Land promised from God?

When God called Abraham to leave Ur of the Chaldees in Mesopotamia, He sent him to a land which he should afterwards receive as an inheritance (read Genesis 12 from verse 1).

In Gen.13:17 God again promised the land to Abraham and his descendants, and, eventually, under the leadership of Joshua, they entered and possessed the land. But their possession of the land was conditional on their faithfulness to God, and Joshua foresaw the time when they would lose the land, because of unfaithfulness (Deuteronomy 30:17-18). Eventually, Israel ceased to be the People of God, as Jesus points out in Matt.21:43. There is now a new 'Israel', which consists of those who have accepted the Gospel (see 1st Peter 2:9-10). This means that today Israel has no automatic right to the land of Palestine. Both Jews and Palestinians should be allowed to set up independent nations.

3. Which is more beneficial - to ask questions or to make statements?

Both are beneficial, and both are necessary! You must ask questions and find the answers before you can make statements. Learning consists in asking questions, and, if you do not ask questions you will not learn. Lord Kelvin, the great Scottish scientist, about to conduct an experiment, used to say to his students at Glasgow University, "Gentlemen please be silent. I am about to ask God a question!"

4. Is it possible that Christians are not taught the Bible properly in Church services?

The quality of the teaching depends on the knowledge and ability of the teachers. If there are no capable teachers in a congregation, the congregation will be untaught. A teacher cannot pass on what he has not learned. And the teacher himself will not learn unless he studies.

5. "God cannot be fooled, so why do so many people think that He can?"

Jesus said that "The god of this world (Satan) has blinded their eyes and stopped their ears...".Matt.13:15. A man must be a fool to imagine he can get the better of God!

6. Can a funeral service be scriptural?

Certainly! Bear in mind that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, and that you should use

your body to serve God. It is fitting that when it dies, it is treated with reverence and respect. A funeral service is simply a reverent way of disposing of the 'tent' which the soul occupied but has left, and, at the same time, it is an opportunity to pay respect to the one who, if he is a Christian, has "gone to be with Christ, which is far better" (see 2nd Cor.5:1-10).

7. Why do we have a weekly Lord's Supper?

Jesus said, "Do this in remembrance of me".

And "they continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching, and the fellowship, and the BREAKING OF THE BREAD, and the prayers" (Acts 2:42).

"Upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break the bread (the Lord's Supper) Paul preached to them" (Acts 20:7).

The First Day of the week is not Monday - as some unbelieving calendar producers appear to think. The First Day of the week is the Lord's Day, commonly called Sunday. The early Christians celebrated that day because it was the day of the Lord's resurrection, and they met on that Day to remember Him in the feast that He had instituted.

I hope you find these answers useful. With kindest regards, your brother in Christ, Frank Worgan.

Seeing Clearly

John Kneller, Tranent

There is a miracle recorded by Mark in chapter 8 and vv 22-26 in which Jesus heals a blind man. The people who brought the man to Jesus for healing knew what Jesus needed to do as they had seen His power before so they tell Him to '**Just touch him**'. Jesus' response to this request was to lead him by the hand out of the village. He certainly touched him when he did that but there was no healing. They must have been shocked and disappointed that the anticipated healing had not happened as they expected but that Jesus just led him away.

In a quiet place Jesus lays hands on him and asks, "*do you see anything*"? The man's reply is "*I see men like trees*". This is better than being blind but distorted vision is hardly ideal. Jesus lays His hands on him again. '*Now he sees clearly*'.

At first glance it seems to be a miracle that doesn't quite work out which is very strange. It is most unusual in that Jesus heals the man in two stages. Some writers have used this to show the supposed human limitations of Jesus and therefore to question his deity. While I don't expect our readers to go down that route it does raise the question in our minds: why did Jesus take two 'attempts' to heal the man?

Only Mark records this miracle but he must have thought that it was worthy of our attention to include it in his gospel and expects us to learn from it. The passage pops up between the feeding of the 5000 and the declaration by Peter that '*You are the Christ*'. This too is unusual, that such a seemingly minor miracle should have such a prominent position in scripture. What are we to make of it and what lessons can we learn from it? There are lots of different explanations given to explain Jesus' actions in this miracle but the following reasons make sense of it for me.

The request of the people bringing the blind man to Jesus seems to be a little frivolous, as though it was the sensational aspect of the healing that they wanted to see. Only touch him and he will be cured was what they expected. Eugene Petersen translates it this way: '**Just give him a healing touch**'. Simple contact with Jesus seemed sufficient to them to effect a

cure. Now that is certainly possible. Mark 5, vv27-28 tells us about the woman who touched the hem of his robe and was healed. But this type of superficial, brief encounter is not what Jesus wants. He wants them to understand the miracles as a sign of His authority, of His deity and of His Messianic mission. He wants to be taken seriously and not treated as some travelling entertainer.

Jesus takes the man out of the village and cures him in stages. That must be significant and must be intended by Mark to teach us something important. Could it be that Mark is showing that a fleeting contact with Jesus will not produce the healing that we seek from Him? Rather it will be through repeated close contact with Jesus that we will gain an increasingly clear spiritual insight and begin to see more clearly and understand more fully His purpose for us. We tend to be like the people who brought the blind man to Jesus in that we want instant action and immediate results without any effort on our part. Our world is full of easy relationships that have no depth or endurance and sometimes we bring these standards to our Christian life as well. The New Testament is about an in-depth relationship with God the Father through Jesus Christ. The parable of the sower teaches a very similar lesson i.e. that plants with a poor root system fail to prosper and soon die.

I remember this miracle from my RE lessons at school when it was held up as a clear example of the limited powers and obvious humanity of Jesus. Actually, the passage teaches the exact opposite of my RE lesson. Jesus is in control all of the time. The problem that faced Jesus was not any limitation on His own power or ability but the very limited understanding of the people about Him including the disciples. The disciples as well as the people are spiritually dull and slow to see the significance of the teaching and miracles of Jesus. In Mark 8, v21 the verse before the healing of the blind man Jesus is obliged to ask the disciples "do you not yet understand?"

This lack of understanding is further illustrated in the verses following the miracle. These verses record Peter's grand confession that 'Jesus is the Christ'. We might be forgiven for thinking from this that the disciples had finally grasped who Jesus was and what He was about but it is quite apparent from Jesus stern rebuke of Peter "to get behind me Satan" that this was not the case. They would need much more time with Jesus and experience the trauma of His crucifixion and joy of His resurrection before they even begin to understand His ministry.

The details of the miracle and its location within Mark's gospel lead me to conclude that there are lessons we can learn from it. Firstly we can see that to enjoy an in-depth relationship with Jesus and God the Father we will need more than a passing acquaintance. We need to make provision for that in our lives, which are often so busy and full that there is only limited space or time for spiritual values in them. 'Be still and know that I am the Lord' says the Psalmist yet how often do we pause long enough to be with our Lord in spirit? The passage also tells me that if I want to have a sense of well being and clear spiritual understanding then it can only be acquired by spending time in prayer and meditation. We all need to feed on the word and grow thereby if we want to understand whom Jesus really is and what He can really do for us. To do that we will need more than casual contact. The disciples took three years to understand who Jesus was and what His mission was. There was no shortcut for them, nor is there one for us.

Our society is littered with failed relationships that were lightly entered into without serious commitment. It would be tragic if our relationship with God our Father were as transient or superficial as those we see in the world about us. Peter, the Rock, experienced some severe tests and failures in his life but he survived them all because he stood beside Jesus in a close relationship. Our faith needs to be deep rooted and strong so that we too can withstand the trying of our faith and having done all to stand.

FUTURE OF THE SCRIPTURE STANDARD

The current team has taken the decision to bring their tenure of the Scripture Standard to a close and with effect from June 2010 a new team, led by Bro Allan Ashurst as editor, will assume responsibility for the future production of the SS. As the above implies, I will be handing over my responsibilities as treasurer as this change happens.

I would like to thank all of you for your loyal support over many years. I would particularly thank those who collected subscriptions within the congregations and then distributed the magazines. This has been the financial and circulation backbone of the 'Standard' and without your involvement there would have been no magazine. The financial support has been excellent and it is many years since I had to appeal for assistance. To those congregations and individuals that consistently gave very generously to finance our outreach to the Third World, a special word of thanks, not just from me, but from all those who received a free copy.

At the present time the SS has sufficient funds to cover the final issue of the current team so would all of our subscribers please note that no further payments are needed. Bro Allan will inform you of the new arrangements in due course.

At the personal level it is a sad moment for me. I have handled the finance and mailing of the 'Standard' since March 1978 and more than £124,000 of your money has passed through my hands over the years to keep the magazine in circulation. It has occupied a lot of my time and without Freda's unstinting support and help I could not have done it.

Currently we send out 550 copies a month. The UK takes 368 copies the remainder going to Africa, India, Asia, Commonwealth countries and the USA. Ruth Nisbet has been a great help with mailing the magazine and Patricia Moncrieff has done the bulk of the proof reading in recent years.

There have been four editors. Walter Crosthwaite was the first followed by Carlton Melling, then James Gardiner and finally Robert Marsden. I'm not sure who served as treasurer in the early days but I took over from Paul Jones. The 'Question Box' has always been a popular feature and has had some notable editors such as Len Channing, Alf Marsden, James Gardiner and of course is presently in the hands of Frank Worgan. Another feature that ran for many years was the Scripture Reading comments. Brother RB Scott of London and Ian Davidson are names that I associate with it. Leonard Morgan contributed a series that ran for many years entitled 'Gleanings' and doubtless there are many other brothers and sisters who have made valuable contributions to the work of the magazine. I feel sure that I speak for all of them when I say that our prayer and hope is that we have served the Lord and His Church well.

Finally, a word of thanks to our printers. Lothian Printers at Dunbar is a family run business and we have been well served by them for many years. They have also printed the Scripture Reading Cards for us and we intend to provide these in future years as long as there is sufficient demand for them.

John Kneller

News and Information

Obituaries

Bro John Dodsley (A Tribute)



John went to be with the Lord on Saturday 6th February after succumbing to an illness that almost certainly started some 6 years previously.

John was added to the Lord's church in May 1954 and came from a background associated with the Salvation Army. He married Betty Longden in March 1955 and shortly afterwards was given the opportunity to study with Bro Albert Winstanley.

He and Betty raised 3 children, David, Andrew and Sue, in a loving Christian household.

John worked tirelessly for the Lord throughout his life as many brethren and sisters throughout the length and breadth of the country will be able to attest to. He never tired of witnessing for the Lord or giving encouragement and support to his fellow brethren and sister churches and was only prevented from meeting with the brethren at Beulah Rd, by the debilitating effects of his illness.

He went into hospital in October 2009 to have Knee Replacement surgery but never recovered enough to be able to

return to church; nevertheless his earnest wish was to be able to meet with the brethren again but sadly this was not to be.

Betty and the family would like to thank all who supported her during the last few weeks of John's life and those who sent cards and letters of condolence, she has been greatly encouraged and comforted by the kindness shown by so many people.

So many of us have memories of John and the sermons that he preached, my own lasting memory of him is one of a true and faithful brother who could never do enough for the Lord so much so that I'm inspired to quote Paul in 2nd Timothy 4, v.7: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (NIV).

He is greatly missed by the brethren and sisters at Beulah Rd, but we know that our loss is the Lord's gain.

Bro Dennis Faulks

Janette Wilson. Newtongrange

Sister Janette passed away suddenly at home on 20th February 2010, four days before her 80th birthday. Janette had recently been in hospital, but due to ill health had not been able to attend meetings for a number of years. Her husband, John, died in 1998. We ask God to comfort Nancy and Joseph and all the family.

Brother David Ferguson conducted a service at Warriston Crematorium, Edinburgh on Friday, 26th February 2010.

M Hunter

Alex Cowie and Elizabeth Cowie. Peterhead

Notices in respect of the deaths of both Bro Alex Cowie and Sister Elizabeth Cowie have been received since the last issue. Both were long standing and much loved members of the church in Peterhead and died within a short time of each other towards the end of 2009. Unfortunately space does not allow us to print the full text of the notices but your prayers are solicited for the church in Peterhead and for the families of Alex and Elizabeth.

Isobel Worgan. Corby

Sister Isobel died in February 2010 after a long illness. She was a much loved and widely respected Christian and a knowledgeable Bible student. A full tribute will be included in the next issue. In the meantime please keep Bro Frank, who enjoyed so much love and support from Isobel in his work for the Lord, and the family in your prayers.

Florence Jones

It is with sorrow that we record the passing from this life of our dear sister Florence Jones.

Florence was a member of the Summer Lane congregation until 1967 when she, with her husband Paul, came to work

with the Slamannan District churches. Paul served the churches for 11 years as evangelist and we remember their years of service with much affection. She will be remembered for her quiet ways, ready smile and friendly nature.

Florence died peacefully at Berrystead Nursing Home on December 18th 2009 with her family beside her. We extend our love and sympathy to her daughters and their families at this sad time. Our hope, and Florence's, is in the Lord Jesus, the Lord of life and glory, our Saviour.

John Kneller

Coming Events

EUROPEAN CHRISTIAN WORKSHOP 2010

**Lancaster University
Thurs 26th Aug to
Sat 28th Aug. 2010**

**THEME - "THE KINGDOM OF GOD"
SONG LEADER - Keith Lancaster**

SPEAKERS & SUBJECTS

Keynote Speaker:
Jeff Walling (USA) - The Kingdom Life

Contact: **Stephen Woodcock**
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THE SCRIPTURE STANDARD

*Future issues will now be Edited by A. Ashurst - ashursta@aol.com
Treasurer: R. M. Payne - rosabelle.payne@btinternet.com*