

The SCRIPTURE STANDARD

Vol. 72 No. 11

NOVEMBER, 2005

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

Editorial **The Civil Partnership Act 2004**

When we are presented with new legislation or research or, sometimes, theories, my personal approach is to examine the subject matter with as open a mind as my background, religious training and knowledge, personal ethos etc will allow. This is difficult because over time we become conditioned to think in a certain way and see issues as either black or white. We are uncomfortable with grey because it removes the certainties and absolutes that give us security of thought and action.

In attempting to be open-minded, the idea is to test the natural or 'knee-jerk' reaction and examine whether the new challenge has any merit or not. For some people this will be regarded as inviting trouble not least because there is the potential to be influenced by other peoples thinking (which incidentally is precisely what we expect non-Christians to do when we approach them to speak to them about Jesus). We have little chance to influence people with the gospel unless **they** are prepared to set aside their own pre-conceptions and allow some new thinking to influence them. It is also true that when we do challenge our assumptions we often emerge from that process with a firmer and more focused grasp of why we held our view in the first place. The legislation sets out its purpose as to "enable same sex couples to obtain legal recognition of their relationship by forming a civil partnership."

There is the possibility too that the end result will be an almost inevitable compromise between the traditional thinking and the new perspective that is being presented. For many people that is precisely the situation that has been ushered in by the Civil Partnership Act 2004, the provisions and repercussions of which I will come to shortly. Suffice to say for now that the fundamental claim for the Act is that it seeks to redress the inequalities that exist between the rights and responsibilities of heterosexual couples compared to what are now commonly called 'same-sex couples'.

How we got here – some observations

However it's perhaps useful to make some observations about how these claimed

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inequalities have arisen. I'm no expert in social development but it seems that we live in a far more complex social environment than has ever existed before in the western 'democratised' world. Marriage between a man and a woman, for companionship and procreation, is a relatively simple social model. In an economic and social model in which people earned and spent (or bartered), where there was little wealth creation and people either continued working or relied upon the nuclear family for support in old age, there was little need to legislate for inheritance or build, for example, pension provision into the financial framework. However as wealth was more commonly created the need to define how that wealth was passed on to future generations became more relevant. Taxation of wealth as well as income was introduced. As social conditions improved and retirement from work became a matter of social justice, so the need to make public and, increasingly, private provision for economic well-being in retirement increased. Provision for the surviving spouse of a marriage became part of the provision and especially so when it was common for only one spouse in a marriage to work. Married couples enjoy concessions on inheritance tax as none arises on transfer between spouses. Married couples have rights under intestacy rules and surviving spouses have next-of-kin rights under pensions legislation. Modern society has greater wealth and is far more fluid, flexible, cosmopolitan and complex than anything that has been experienced before.

What has developed over the last 30 years or so is a social model in which 'alternative lifestyles' and alternative definitions of the family have become more accepted and more prominent. And of course as these alternatives have grown so the demand from the pressure groups and proponents of these alternative lifestyles has been to recognize them formally and give them the same rights and responsibilities as enjoyed by those in conventional marriage relationships. There is no doubt that these groups have been spectacularly successful in pushing their agenda and winning public approval aided and abetted by the media which seems hell bent on supporting the modern, 'progressive', social agenda. Whether it has any merit or not, The Civil Partnership Act is a natural result of the social revolution that is taking place around us. The above is my own basic (simplistic even) outline of how we have reached the current position.

What are 'civil partnerships'?

On December 5th 2005, same sex couples became entitled to register their intention to formalize their relationship and by the time this article is read, assuming that it is after the 21st December (19th December in Northern Ireland) the first same sex couples will have taken advantage of the Civil Partnership Act 2004 and formalized their relationship in civic ceremonies. They will have become what are to be known as 'civil partners'. This will be done through a statutory civil registration procedure and the same sex couple will sign a civil partnership document that will entitle them to a range of rights and impose a number of responsibilities that very closely mirror those of married couples. The registration, under the statute, must **not** take place in religious premises (defined as premises that are used solely or mainly for religious purposes) but must take place in the presence of the partners, the registrar and at least two witnesses.

As stated before, the rationale behind the introduction of this Act is to give equal rights to same sex couples, who are in committed long-term relationships, as those enjoyed by heterosexual married couples. The civil partner will be regarded as next-of-kin. The debate has moved on from whether such relationships are right (it is now accepted by the majority that they are), to the kind of rights that they should enjoy in those relationships. There are two main injustices (there are others) that are frequently quoted that the legislation seeks to address. The first is that same sex couples previously couldn't transfer assets between themselves without incurring inheritance tax, whilst married couples can. In the same vein a surviving partner of a same-sex relationship previously had no rights

in the case of a 'partner' dying intestate (i.e. without making a will). Secondly, pensions legislation was previously less favourable to same sex couples than it is to conventionally married couples. The new legislation makes the situation the same for 'civil partners' as is the case for conventionally married couples.

A possible scenario with merit?

Let's be open-minded for a moment and examine whether we can find any merit in this legislation. Does it really add to social justice and equality? Take the example two people of the same sex who have lived together in the same home for 30 years. One of the couple dies and under the previous legislation the surviving member of the couple had no rights to inherit any of the estate of the deceased without the imposition of inheritance tax, and no rights to any pension fund built up by the deceased. Assume now that the couple involved is two women (or men) who simply chose to live together for companionship, with no sexual connotation to the relationship. It could I suppose be two Christians, simply sharing companionship, having everything in common enjoying their lives together and making provision together for the time when one of them would inevitably be left alone. Under the previous legislation the surviving member of the couple would have no rights to inherit the property or assets of the deceased without having to pay inheritance tax. Under the new legislation, provided the couple had registered their civil partnership, inheritance could take place without the imposition of inheritance tax – the same rule that applies to married couples.

Whether two Christians would wish to use this legislation to do that and go through the civil partnership registration process and regard the other person as a 'partner' and next-of-kin is another matter. I think anyway it would be a situation that the legislation hardly envisages (I'm assuming it would allow it), because another similar scenario, that of two siblings living together (even if they are same sex), is, I understand, not allowable under the legislation. Let me stress that in postulating the above scenarios I am reflecting on a perfectly 'innocent', non-sexual, friendship/companionship relationship.

From an 'open-mind' perspective it could be argued that there is merit and equality in the new legislation however much my immediate reaction as a Christian might be to reject it. I really do not have any moral difficulty in giving two same-sex **companions** the right to benefit from the financial provision that has been made, maybe jointly, over the years if that is what the economic environment demands. It seems to be a perfectly reasonable approach that potentially deals effectively with an historical ambiguity.

The real intention

The problem is that the scenario painted in the two paragraphs above, would, I think, be attaching to the legislation a purity of motive towards social justice for the few that belies the real intention of the Act and which it frankly does not in any way deserve.

Scratch the surface of this legislation, and witness the general reaction to it, and you quickly appreciate that this legislation is far from a vehicle to deal with some perceived inequality in social provision. Rather it is legislation arising from the seemingly inexorable advance and acceptance of homosexual relationships, the alternative lifestyles that we are asked to believe are good for our society. Government Minister Jacqui Smith has said of this legislation, "*A loving relationship, whether of opposite sex couples or same-sex couples benefits society as a whole...*" Of the Act she said, "*I hope this Act will help create a more equal society. It opens the way to respect, recognition and justice for those who have been denied it for too long.*" The press has focused on what is inaccurately described as 'gay marriage' (it isn't marriage – look at the dictionary!) and particularly the high profile cases such as Elton John and his partner who will utilize the legislation on December 21st. Commercial wedding organisers are already exploiting the opportunity to

promote the 'marriage' aspect. Travel firms are already marketing 'gay' honeymoons; Superdrug has produced 'his and his' towel sets etc, etc.

In most respects the civil partnership mirrors conventional marriage. Tax laws are to be the same as are intestacy laws. Adoption by 'couples' (defined as "two people, whether of different sexes or the same sex living together as partners in an enduring family relationship") was already allowed under the Adoption and Children Act 2002. That Act has now been amended under the new legislation so that it is specifically stated that this includes two people who are civil partners. Civil partnerships can be dissolved and the rules again largely mirror those for divorce. Financial provisions on dissolution again mirror those for marriage.

So we need be in no doubt as to the real intent of the new Act and that is to legislate on behalf of same sex couples to mirror as closely as possible the legislation applying to conventional marriage. It is intended to be marriage in all but name. It is intended to make homosexual relationships as normal as conventional heterosexual relationships. Same sex couples living in loving relationships (and let us be in no doubt that that implies sexually active relationships) are now accepted as being every bit as valid and proper as conventional man/woman marriages. It is one of the most far-reaching pieces of legislation that we have seen because it changes forever, (in secular terms at least), the fundamental scriptural truth that marriage was intended by God, and defined by him, as the joining together of man and woman. And some supposedly Christian people have fallen hook, line and sinker for the propaganda that places this change as a modern approach. Cliff Richard, as one example, a born-again Christian, has suggested that had Jesus been around today he would have accepted this as a valid response to changing circumstances.

Reliance on God's way

Well, homosexuality was around in Jesus day and I can find no shred of evidence in the New Testament that Jesus would have accepted 'civil partnerships' as right. We will be accused of being discriminatory for saying so, but in reality for the Christian it is not discrimination at all, it is merely the expression of what we believe that the Bible teaches. And I am perfectly content to believe that God, who designed and created us, actually knows what is best for us. Homosexual people are no different from any other cross-section of society; there are some wonderful homosexual people just as there are some wonderful heterosexual people; similarly there are some nasty people within both those two groups as well; and there are many others in between. And we have always said that whilst we may hate the sin, we love the sinner. It's just that our understanding of Jesus' teaching, God's plan and design, is that in his wisdom he defines marriage as being between one man and one woman. He says that homosexuality is one of several types of activity that he describes as sexual immorality. We shall have to continue in faith to believe that God knows best what is right for his creation. It is not discrimination towards homosexuals that says that the wider implications of this legislation are wrong – it is trust in God's word and teaching.

My daily newspaper, the Independent carried an editorial piece that said: "Some Christian groups have argued that this new law undermines 'traditional marriage'. But this presumes a peculiarly narrow view of what constitutes a marriage. Up until now thousands of people in long-term, stable loving relationships have been denied the ability to commit themselves, in the eyes of the law, to their partners. From this point of view, surely this new law actually bolsters the institution of marriage, rather than damages it." I can only repeat that it is not 'Christian groups' who have defined marriage. It is God. And whatever the social progressives may tell us, **we** have no right or justification to take Him out of our thinking.

The Will of God

The will of God will never take you,
where the grace of God cannot keep you,
where the arms of God cannot support you,
where the riches of God cannot supply your needs,
where the power of God cannot endow you.

The will of God will never take you,
where the Spirit of God cannot work through you,
where the wisdom of God cannot teach you,
where the army of God cannot protect you,
where the hands of God cannot mould you.

The will of God will never take you,
where the love of God cannot enfold you,
where the mercies of God cannot sustain you,
where the peace of God cannot calm your fears,
where the authority of God cannot overrule for you.

The will of God will never take you,
where the comfort of God cannot dry your tears,
where the Word of God cannot feed you,
where the miracles of God cannot be done for you,
where the omnipresence of God cannot find you.

*Taken from "A Bucket of Surprises"
by J John & Mark Stibbe*

The Fine Print

by John Fischer

"We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair. We are hunted down, but never abandoned by God. We get knocked down, but we are not destroyed. Through suffering, our bodies continue to share in the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be seen in our bodies." (2 Corinthians 4:8-10 NLT)

These verses are what I call the fine print of the Christian life. When you sign up, you sign up for this, but unfortunately, not too many people read that far into the contract, and not enough leaders point it out. So when bad things start happening to us, we think something went wrong with our faith. Not necessarily, in fact, it's an honor to think that your faith is worthy of being tested.

It's a reverse spiritual principle that nonetheless is true: we get beaten down so that Christ might rise in us. It's the whole idea God has of avoiding confusion. See, He doesn't want people confusing human power and achievement with His power and what He is achieving in and through our lives. If all Christians were super-Christians, people would be impressed with them. As it is, God wants people to be surprised at us, not so much impressed — surprised that we can keep on believing, given what has happened to us. Surprised at us — impressed with God. That's the way it should go.

It's important to know this so that the things that happen don't throw us into a tailspin. Paul wrote in the passage above that troubles, confusions, knock-downs and drag-outs, are all to be expected in a life of faith, and they are not just something to suck it up and endure, they are what will actually release the power of God in our lives. We encounter deathlike experiences so that Christ's lifelike nature may clearly be seen in us, despite what is happening.

Let me try and say this again. This is not just endurance training through tough times. This is God's strategy for ministry through us. There is no other way for it to be done. His strategy is His power and strength through our weakness — His life through our death. This doesn't just happen to some Christians; it happens to us all if we desire to be effective in our faith.

So don't forget the fine print today, and allow the troubles you face to springboard you into finding God's purposes even in this. He had this planned all along. It's even in the contract!



The historical and cultural background to the New Testament (8)

Ian S Davidson, Motherwell

PHILOSOPHY

Paul encountered Stoics and Epicureans in Athens during his second missionary journey. (Acts 17) Stoicism was founded by Zeno (350-260 BC) who originally came from Kition in Cyprus. Epicureanism was another major Hellenistic philosophy named after one Epicurus of Samos. (341-270 BC) Famous Roman Stoics were Seneca of Cordoba (4 BC – AD 65), Epictetus of Hierapolis (AD 50-138) and Marcus Aurelius. (AD 121-180) The Latin poet Lucretius (98-55 BC) expressed Epicurean ideas in his famous poem *On the Nature of Things*.

“The core of the Stoic philosophy lies in the view that there could be no authority higher than reason.” (Bryan Magee) Stoics were pantheists. To them, the world of Nature is all the reality there is. In other words, the world is full of God and is God. They believed that, on death, the human being did not enter into another realm, but dissolved back into Nature. There could be no question of anyone going anywhere else. Therefore, everyone’s own morality should be faced with unruffled acceptance. Emotions should never get in the way. Stoics should show calmness and dignity throughout all of life’s vicissitudes. A stiff upper lip and all that!

The Roman emperor, Marcus Aurelius (AD 121-180), reveals a lot about Stoical thinking in his book *Meditations*. Amazingly, the book is still being published over eighteen hundred years after his death. For example, a new translation by Gregory Hays, assistant professor of classics at the University of Virginia, came out in 2003. In the introduction, Hays writes: “Marcus does not offer us a means of achieving happiness, but only a means of resisting pain. The stoicism of the *Meditations* is fundamentally a defensive policy...For Marcus, life was a battle, and often it must have seemed – what in some sense it must always be – a losing battle.” The book contains many fine thoughts, but it is empty of hope.

The Epicureans were the earliest scientific and liberal humanists. The philosophy of Epicurus was materialistic, pleasure-seeking and non-religious. He talked of liberating people not only from the fear of death, but the fear of life. He once declared: “Death is nothing to us”. Consequently, he taught that we should all make the best of the only life we have. The best way to achieve this would be to enter into a community of like-minded people – open even to women and slaves. “When Christianity came on the scene the Epicureans were anathema to Christians in particular, because of their denial of immortality and of the existence of a benevolent God, and also because of their affirmation of the values of this world.” (Magee) (Paul’s address in Athens should be carefully studied in the light of the foregoing).

OTHER GREEK PHILOSOPHIES

Greek thinking influenced Roman thinking. Pythagorus (578-496 BC), Socrates (469-399 BC), Plato (428-347 BC), Aristotle (384-322 BC), the Sceptics (Pyrrhon 365-275 BC), and the Cynics (Diogenes 403-323 BC) all left their mark in the Greek world and in the Roman world. Indeed, their influence extends even to our own times. Personally, I like to read of the comparisons between the two great giants – Plato and

Aristotle. Aristotle was, of course, Plato's pupil; but teacher and pupil did not see everything alike. Aristotle liked to keep his feet firmly on the ground. Plato believed in higher things beyond this world. Raphael's painting, *The School of Athens*, which is in the Vatican, reveals a painter who understood the differences between them. "In *The School of Athens*, Raphael painted Plato with one finger pointed upward, which means that he pointed to the absolutes or ideals. In contrast, he pictured Aristotle with the fingers spread wide and thrust downward toward the earth, which means that he emphasised particulars. By particulars we mean the individual things which are about us; a chair is a particular, as is each molecule which makes up the chair, and so on. The individual person is also a particular and thus you are a particular. Thomas Aquinas brought this Aristotelian emphasis on individual things – the particulars – into the philosophy of the late Middle Ages, and this set the stage for the humanistic elements of the Renaissance and the basic problem they created." (Francis Schaeffer)

A lot of people associate Pythagorus only with mathematics. But he was more than a mathematician. In fact, he was also a philosopher and a mystic. Pythagoreans, for example, believed in reincarnation. In his book *A History of Western Philosophy*, Bertrand Russell has a chapter on Pythagorus. He writes: "I do not know of any other man who has been as influential as he was in the sphere of thought." I can think of others. I differ from Russell because, of course, he was an unbeliever.

GNOSTICISM

I once studied this subject for a whole year. I realised that to do justice to a presentation on John's epistles I had to know something of Gnosticism. My studies led me to St Andrews to interview one of the world's leading experts on Gnosticism – Professor R. McLachlan Wilson, Professor Emeritus of Biblical Criticism, St. Mary's College, University of St. Andrews. He helped me tremendously and I still refer to the lengthy informative letters he kindly sent me back in the 1980's. He never once told me about the books he had written. Later, I read his work entitled *The Gnostic Problem*, which was the basis of his Ph.D. at Cambridge.



Gnosticism is a philosophy or religion to do with *gnosis*, the Greek word for knowledge. It was a secret knowledge that some believed could bring salvation to the soul. At its heart, Gnosticism was addressing the problem of evil in the world. Its adherents viewed spirit as essentially good and matter as essentially evil. It was unthinkable, therefore, that there could be peaceful co-existence between the two; in particular, it was unthinkable that there could be any direct relation between God, who is pure spirit, and the material universe. The Biblical doctrine of creation must be rejected. Also, the message that God came in human form must be regarded as false. The real Messiah could not have lived and died in a body. Jesus must have been a phantom. As He walked this earth, He could not have left any footprints upon the soil. The apostle John responded to this falsehood by boldly declaring: **"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father) full of grace and truth."** (John 1:14) **"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life..."** (1 John 1:1) **"This is He who came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is truth."** (1 John

5:6). Clearly, the Messiah has come in human form and died on the cross for the sins of the world. It was on the cross that His side was speared. From his side there flowed blood and water. (John 19: 34)

The apostle John met the challenge of Gnostic teaching head on. It was dangerous teaching. It contradicted the gospel. Gnosticism was in denial of the reality of the creation and the incarnation. It exalted an imaginary knowledge above a pure faith. Its followers had become an intellectual aristocracy, possessed of an esoteric teaching, which elevated them far above their simple brethren. As one writer has put it: "They confused the true nature of sin, turned religion and morality into curious questions, placed salvation in systems of metaphysics and by vain speculation and verbal analyses lost sight of the practical answer which Christianity had given to all the deepest problems of human life." They were out to destroy the fellowship and could have succeeded, but for the intervention of John, whose life, I believe, was extended by God to enable him to fight this gigantic serpent ever lurking by the cradle of the infant church.

Gnosticism is a complicated religion. One only needs to read Kurt Rudolph's *Gnosis* to see that. The influences of Gnosticism are still with us. Rudolph has pointed out that they can be detected in European and Near Eastern traditions, be it theology, theosophy, mysticism or philosophy. He should know. He wrote the book after twenty-five years of study. Christianity has survived despite whatever Satan has thrown at it. Men may turn to Stoicism, Epicureanism, Platonism, Aristotelianism, Scepticism, Cynicism, Pythagoreanism, Gnosticism, or whatever, but the truth of the matter is that they must turn to The Truth to be saved. Jesus said: "**I am the Way, the Truth and the Life: no man comes unto the Father, but by me.**" (John 14:6)

WONDERFUL WOMAN

Women of the Bible 7

Ann Boland, Germany

DEBORAH

The next woman we read about had an interesting position for a woman of those times, i.e. Deborah. We meet her in **Judges 4**. We learn that God set up judges to save His people (**Judges 2:16**), but not much more is said about their duties, or even their personalities. One thing is sure: they must have been people who loved the Lord, and who were honourable, because of the nature of the position. **Judges 4 and 5** deals with the story of Barak, who was sent, by Deborah to deal with Jabin's army (**Judges 4:2**). Barak was unwilling to do it without Deborah, and so God allowed the victory to go to a woman, Jael (**Judges 4:17 – 21**). In itself, the story deals with the triumph of the people of God, and does not say much about Deborah herself. But, two points are worth noting: the first is that women were allowed to be judges, and second that victory was given to a woman (women were normally very far away from the fighting). Perhaps this was to show that in God's eyes, men and women have equal value, even if they are not equal in everything, for example, women are not permitted to speak in the assembly (**I Corinthians 14:34**).

DELILAH

Still in **Judges**, we next meet another interesting woman, but not in a positive sense as was the case with Deborah and Jael. This woman is Delilah, a Philistine woman. Samson fell in love with her **Judges 16:4**. I'm sure we all recall the story of how she asked Samson the secret of his strength, and how he told her three different stories, all of which were false. In hindsight, we can be amazed at his gullibility – three times she had asked him, and three times the Philistines attacked him. They say love is blind! She finally managed to get the truth out of him, and he was captured by the Philistines, and pulled down the temple on himself and his captors. This can be taken as a warning about people we choose to love and associate with. God had constantly warned His people to take care not to marry the Philistines, or those who were not the Chosen Ones. We see the result in this story, and will do well to remember **Phillipians 4:8 : whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy- think about such things**. We are not told **not** to have friends in the world, but the above verse will help us to choose wisely, unlike Samson.

In order, the next woman is Ruth, but, as her story is so edifying and lovely, I will deal with her in the next issue.

HANNAH

So we come to another story of faith: that of Hannah, the mother of Samuel. We find her story in **I Samuel 1 and 2**. We are told that she was the wife of Elkanah, and that she was childless (**v 2**). Elkanah loved Hannah, despite this fact (**v 5**), and this probably added to the other wife's provocation (**v 6**). Any woman in this position would have the exact same feelings as Hannah, who had this treatment for years – she wept and would not eat. In her misery she turned to prayer (a very important lesson for all of us). However, even then she had no peace, as Eli, a priest, thought she was drunk, as her lips moved, but no sound came out (**v 12 – 14**). When the situation had been explained, he sent her away with a blessing of peace (**v 17**). God heard Hannah's prayer, and gave her what she wanted, and she gave God what she promised – she took Samuel to live in the temple.

Several things spring to mind while reading this story.

- we can always go to God in prayer, whether for strength, things we think we need, or guidance. He won't always give us what we ask for, but will give us what we need (not necessarily the same thing).
- if God gives us what we asked for, we must give what we promised, not very easy in many cases.
- we must not judge appearances, very often things are not what they seem at first glance. Eli thought Hannah was drunk, but she was praying in her misery. Very often people have walked past others lying on the ground, because they assumed the person was drunk, when he or she may have fainted or had a heart-attack.
- when our prayers are answered, we should accept the answer, even if it might not be what we expected – God always knows best

The ‘Quasi-trials’ of Jesus the Christ

(Ernest Makin, Wigan)

FOREWORD

This series of articles that will only superficially examine the quasi-judicial questioning of Jesus the Nazarene is born out of an acutely felt mixture of emotions. There is a deep, personal, immature anger at the moral failings of the Jewish and Roman interrogators; there is a deepening and increasing love towards a voluntary, substitutionary Saviour, who first loved me; there is a feeling of deep shame and remorse that my human imperfections identify myself with sinning humanity. Amid this cocktail of emotions, as one reads the inspired accounts of the treatment of Jesus at the hands of his hostile interrogators, there bursts onto the human psyche the revelation that Jesus the Christ, the Son of Man, the Son of God, voluntarily and without demur knowingly faced such hostility and its indescribable physical, emotional and mental pain for me. The Gospel is such a deep, personal experience that one cannot but become involved emotionally with the Lord of Life and Liberty. There is sadness, too, that the Creator and sustainer of the Universe was to be brutally and illegally murdered at the “hands of lawless men”, but joy abounds on the realisation that this shameless death was the prelude to the most earth shaking event in the history of the world – THE BLESSED RESSURECTION OF THE LORD JESUS, THE CHRIST. AND, FURTHERMORE GOD SO LOVED ME THAT HE WILLED THESE EVENTS BEFORE THE FONDATION OF THE WORLD. So we rejoice that the cross was a place of victory over death, the final enemy.

There is un-bounded joy and hope that I too may share in the glory of the Christ on the basis of my faith in Jesus, and as a child of God I am a co-heir with my elder brother, my beloved Saviour. Perhaps reader when you realise the “height and depth, length and breadth” of the all embracing grace of God and the love of Jesus for sinful humanity, you too, will love Jesus and acknowledge him as your Lord and Saviour.

PART 1

JESUS BEFORE THE JEWISH AUTHORITIES

“The Chief Priests, the Elders and all the Council sought false witnesses against Jesus to put him to death.”



Jesus before Annas

But they found none. Many false witnesses did come forward. During approximately eighteen hours of interrogation and physical punishment Jesus faced six different hearings. His interrogators were from the Jewish priestly caste, the Roman occupying forces in Jerusalem and a puppet king, Herod Antipas. The preliminary hearing was before the lifelong High Priest, Annas, the father in law of the ruling High Priest, Caiaphas. Annas was ruling High Priest from AD7 to AD14 and had been deposed by the Roman authorities. Caiaphas was the

ruling High Priest from AD18 to AD37. This priestly family therefore ruled the Jewish theocracy at a most turbulent time in the history of the Jewish nation.

Palestine was agog with the effects of the incarnation of the Son of God, Jesus of Nazareth. The doctrines taught by Jesus with the authority of his heavenly Father, His mighty signs and wonders worked before many contemporaries, His standing among the ordinary people, His claims to be the fulfilment of the messianic prophecy, all made him to be a real threat to the established order of things in Jerusalem. Not least, his claim that he had come to fulfil the Mosaic Law and not destroy it was a danger to the priestly interpretation of this Law with all the rabbinical accretions. Hence Caiaphas advised that **"it was expedient that one should die for the people"** and that this man must be Jesus.

In perhaps his longest defensive statement in these eighteen hours, Jesus resolutely informed Annas that his ministry was an open book. He had taught in synagogues and the temple with Jewish witnesses always present. He had not said nor done anything in secret. His ministerial record could be confirmed by his own followers and even by those witnesses who might regard him in an adverse light. Before Annas, he was physically abused by one of the military officers and then, bound, he was paraded in front of the ruling high priest, Caiaphas.

Jesus before Caiaphas

At last two false witnesses came forward with corroborative evidence. The plurality of witnesses is an important principle in Mosaic Law. (These references might be noted - Num 35:30; Deut 17:6; Matt 18:19; 2 Cor 13:1; 1 Tim 5:19) Paradoxically the 'false' witnesses were reporting facts, they had got it right, but correct interpretation of their testimony by the High Priest was sadly astray. **"This fellow said I am able to destroy the temple and raise it in three days."** Interestingly Jesus did not say he would rebuild the temple but he used a word that related the raising up to a resurrection. Jesus was not speaking of the temple built by Zerrubbabel five hundred years previously and remodelled by Herod the Great and ultimately finished by Herod Agrippa after 46 years of work. Rather, John informs his readers, Jesus **"was speaking of the temple of His body."** His disciples were to remember this prophetic statement after his resurrection.



Jesus before Caiaphas

In a legal nicety, Caiaphas placed Jesus under oath by saying, **"I adjure you by the living God tell us if you are the Messiah the Son of God."** Jesus answered, **"It is as you have said"**, an answer in the affirmative that he strengthened by quoting two messianic references from Psalm 101 and Daniel 7:13. Jesus was spat upon, He was physically beaten and stood before his accusers guilty, in their eyes, of the trumped up charge of blasphemy. Caiaphas, as rabbinical law demanded, rent his clothes in the atmosphere of presumed blasphemy and the verdict was, **"he is guilty of death"**. Hypocrisy was here personified in the actions and words of the high priest. Time was proceeding apace, the Passover was nigh and the hearings had to be finished and given some semblance of legality.

The expediency of the death of Jesus loomed large in the high priestly timetable. Just before daybreak the High Council was summoned and a quorum was established. It met to rubber stamp the previous hearings and to make them appear legal. This was not a hearing to procure justice. It was an illegal gathering of less than the full council to justify the preconceptions of the guilt of Jesus. **"They plotted against Jesus to put him to death."**

Jesus had now been condemned to death on religious grounds by the priestly leaders and the elders. However only the Roman Procurator, representative of Roman might in Jerusalem, could grant the death penalty. Standing innocent and bloodied before Pontius Pilate, accused illegally of blasphemous utterances, and with treason and rebellion now being added to his so-called infamy, Jesus faced further interrogation.

AN APPLICATION TO OUR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Paul in his letter to the Romans says that those **"led by the Spirit"**, i.e. those who produce the fruit of the Spirit in their lives (see Galatians 5:22,23) are the children of God, and the sovereign Lord is their Father. They are permitted to use the intimate Aramaic appellation of "ABBA" introduced by Jesus. In Roman law, every adopted child enjoyed all of the privileges of the adopting parent. Christians have been adopted into the family of God and are **"joint-heirs"** with **"the only begotten of God"**. Peter tells the persecuted Christians in Rome that this inheritance is **"eternal, undefiled and reserved in heaven."**

Believers are directly identified with the statement of Jesus when he said His body was the **"temple of God"**. The evidence for this lies in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. **"Do you not know"**, (a question demanding the answer 'Yes') **"that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you... For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are."** (1 Cor 3:16) This revelation is reinforced by the words in 1 Cor 6:19, **"Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price, therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which belong to God."** Jesus has gone before and illumined the way. Even before His interrogation before the Jewish authorities the words of Jesus identify an indissoluble relationship between Himself and obedient believers, those who confess HIM as Lord and Christ, and behave as such. **"And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, 'Abba, Father!' Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through the Christ."** (Gals 4:6,7)

Believers enjoy, and are blessed with, a fellowship with and in the Christ that is truly amazing and awe-inspiring and should generate complete obedience to a Father who loved us so much. The disciples of Jesus share in His death by a spiritual crucifixion at immersion; they share his glorifying of God by **"walking in the spirit and not in the flesh"**. This is **"newness of life"** and Christians ultimately enjoy victory over physical death when Jesus reappears. The disciple is of man most favoured because like Jesus he can live to be "the temple of God".

"And if children then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ."

(In Part 2 we shall follow the footsteps of Jesus before Pontius Pilate and Herod Antipas.)

Light of the World

Una Birch (Morley)

Lighthouses and lifeboat stations always attract and are familiar to many of us. When touring on holiday my husband and I make a point of visiting them. Recently when caravanning we were sited opposite St Mary's Island off the coast of Northumberland. In the mid-1990's all the UK's continuing lighthouses were automated, though some, like this one, were de-commissioned. Despite modern technology such as GPS (Global Positioning Systems), lighthouses are still needed around the rugged coastlines bordering the oceans and seas of the world.

Isn't viewing one fascinating? Outlined on the headland or at the harbour entrance, it is lovely to watch the first magnified beam sweeping across the water as the light source is activated. A navigating light in the darkness for the mariner, who, timing the flashes, discerns the pattern, and by that determines which light it is, and with this knowledge steers past dangerous rocks and through treacherous channels to safety. What a comforting thought it must have been for the seaman especially in years past, to see that gleam on a dark stormy night. But, as history records, to miss the beacon due to difficult weather, or disregard it usually meant shipwreck.

I am
the light
of the
world

In John 8:12 we read these words of Jesus. **"I am the light of the world; whoever follows me will have the light of life and will never walk in darkness."** In oceanic terms isn't the lighthouse the light of life to many?

I often think about this light that Jesus says that he is. In my understanding it seems that as he is "the life made manifest" – he is God revealed. And as God is Love and the Word then the light that Jesus is must be that light of Life, Love and the Word illuminated. Love is the brilliance that extinguishes the darkness.

"I am the light of the world." Jesus then (the brightness of God's glory) is the navigating light to safety and salvation. Whoever follows that life, metaphorically the seaman on life's ocean, and there is a sense in that is what we all are, is sure to find safe anchorage in Jesus.

Now I come to the most thought-provoking and challenging part. Matthew 5:14 records Jesus as saying, **"You are like light for the whole world. A city built**

on a hill cannot be hidden. No one lights a light and puts it under a bowl; instead he puts it on the lampstand, where it gives light for everyone in the house. In the same way your light must shine before people, so that they may see the good things you do and praise your Father in heaven."

Scriptural dialogue is becoming quite difficult today in a society that doesn't appear to want to hear. I suggest therefore that if I want to Talk the Talk I have to Walk the Walk. I remember singing in Sunday School, 'Jesus bids us shine with a pure clean heart, like a little candle burning in the night. It was accepted as a children's hymn.....A children's hymn?? In his letter to the Philippians at 2:15 Paul; reminds us that **"you are children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation among whom you shine as lights in the world."**

In Acts 2, Peter, preaching to those present, said to them: **"Repent and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."** Responding to the same message we too at our baptism received the Holy Spirit. So God, who is love, abides in my person, and endows me with the power to illuminate that love. After all these years it is still an awesome thought to grasp; that I, as the believer, the Christian, among my friends and contacts, am his navigating light in the darkness. Can they see HIM in me? It brings tears to realise what my answer might honestly be. Can they really see HIM in me – am I a functioning lighthouse?

This is my new life in Christ but quite often the old life interferes and I find my illumination in danger of self-decommissioning! Am I alone in experiencing this? It is something I try to deal with daily, and, with his help, take personal responsibility for my light.

Paul, encouraging the Thessalonian brethren, says to them (and us) "Do not restrain the Holy Spirit." (1 Thess 5:19) Of course automation is the key today, but can you conceive the lighthouse keeper in the early days climbing all of those steps, lighting the lamp, then putting a cover over it? Jesus expressed the negative side of this action with the candle and bowl and in the same passage is, I think, saying to us (in my words): *You are my light in the world. Shine. Let the spirit within you burn brightly. When it radiates from you like a spotlight on a dark night, how can it be concealed? You are the building from which the Holy Spirit, who dwells in you, is illuminated. My Lighthouse. As a disciple, in fellowship with me, beam to others the good news of my Gospel. If you beam my love, they may listen, and lives will be saved. The lantern is lit and the Spirit is the eternal flame, the source of your light. Do not cover it up or smother it.*

IN THIS WORLD OF DARKNESS WE MUST SHINE, YOU IN YOUR SMALL CORNER AND I IN MINE!

The best expression of the Gospel is your life and mine (Leonard Morgan)

News and Information

Ghana Appeal

Donations to the Ghana Fund are much appreciated and care is taken to allocate the funds appropriately and economically. The result has been continued church growth and relief of distress experienced by brethren. Lives have been saved through medical treatment.

Recent requests include necessary repairs to meeting places and bibles for Bible Classes. There are a number of requests for help in further outreach including items such as bibles, hymn books benches and some form of lighting for evening meetings. We continue to hear of baptisms.

There are two separate incidents of brethren's homes being burned down leaving them not only homeless but having lost all their possessions. We have responded to their needs.

There is also an appeal from a church secretary for help in paying hospital fees for a sister who teaches in Sunday School..

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

Question Box

There is no Question Box feature in this month's edition as Bro Frank

Worgan has recently undergone major surgery that has required that he take a (hopefully) short time off from preparing the QB feature. Frank is currently recuperating from his operation, and I am sure that all readers will join me in sending our love and wishing him a speedy recovery back to full health.

Editor

Coming Events

European Christian Workshop

**Lancaster University:
31st August to 2nd September
2006**

Speakers are:

Alastair Ferrie (Dundee)
Mark Hill (Loughborough, UK)
John Griffiths (Wembley, UK)
Trevor Williams (Bristol, UK)
Tony Coffey (Dublin, Ireland)
Earl Lavender (Lipscomb Univ., USA)
Mike Williams (Lipscomb Univ., USA)
Evertt Huffard (Harding Graduate School of Religion, USA)

For more information visit our website:
www.christianworkshop.net

Alternatively you can email for information to:

paulhalliday@yahoo.com
stephen.woodcock@tesco.net

We are in the process of finalizing costs but will provide that information as soon as possible.

Paul Halliday (Newport)
Stephen Woodcock (Wigan)

Tranent, Scotland

Annual Social to be held on
18th March 2006 in
St. Martins Hall, Tranent.

Speakers:

Niall Scobie, Dennyloanhead
Graeme Pearson, Dunfermline.

Types of Prayer

How would you feel if your child were always in your presence and never spoke one word to you? God is our Father and we are His children if we have obeyed the truth, but some of us do not even bother to talk to our Protector. This is certainly contrary to 1 Thess. 5:17, where we are commanded to "Pray without ceasing." This means to be ready always to pray. If we conduct ourselves as obedient children, we will not try to escape from our Father. In 1 Timothy 2:1, prayers is generally classified in four categories:

1. Supplications are strong inward cryings as we fall prostrate at the mercy of God. This is illustrated in the prayer of David, "O God, thou knowest my foolishness and my sins are not hid

from thee." (Psalm 69:5).

2. Prayers, in the text, refers to petitions, entreaties, or solemn requests to God. This involves begging, asking, and seeking. Jesus so prayed as recorded in Luke 22:42, "Father, if it be thy will, let this cup pass from me..."

3. Intercessions are prayerful petitions raised in behalf of others. We need to concern ourselves with the godly comfort, protection, and forgiveness of others as well as for our ourselves. Stephen when stoned prayed: "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." Christ prayed on the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

4. Thanksgiving is the final category of prayer in our text. God, as a loving Father, gives us bountiful blessings, both materially and spiritually. In return we are to express gratitude. When Jesus fed the five thousand in John 6:11, it is said that He "gave thanks" for the same.

Our prayers should contain these basic elements. Every child of God needs to talk to his Father several times daily. Let us remember that no problem is so great that we cannot talk to God about it. He is loving, understanding, and is quick to forgive us our trespasses. (Psalm 86:5).

THE SCRIPTURE STANDARD is published monthly.

PRICE PER COPY – POST PAID FOR ONE YEAR

UNITED KINGDOM. £9.00

OVERSEAS BY SURFACE MAIL. £10.00 (\$16.00US or \$20.00Can)

OVERSEAS BY AIR MAIL. £14.00 (\$22.00US or \$28.00Can)

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