

# 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* **Power to lay down our lives?**

One of the threats of modern life that we have all become dramatically more aware of over the last few years is the devastating effect of 'suicide bombers'. There is little doubt that as a means of delivering death and destruction to a specific target, suicide bombing represents a singularly effective method, not least because in the execution of the act (if not in its conception) the perpetrators of these murderous acts tend to work alone making prevention almost impossible. The organisations behind these horrific acts, and other acts of terrorism, will often say that to prevent them the authorities have to get lucky every time, whilst the perpetrators only need to get lucky once to cause death and destruction.

### FREE FROM CARING

I don't intend to delve into the religious beliefs about the after-life that seem to lie behind the willingness of some people to literally blow themselves to bits. Nor should the reference to these acts be taken as indicating any sympathy whatsoever with them. I have none. However there is no doubt that there is a serious amount of power attaching to people who simply do not care about the consequences of their actions either on themselves or on other people. In this context there is a huge distinction between power and authority. The suicide bomber has no authority for his (or her) actions, but wields enormous power over the course of other people's lives and the power that they so maliciously take to themselves is also destructive rather than constructive. We need only witness the relative

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impotence of battle-hardened troops to prevent such acts in Iraq to accept the truth of these observations.

Provided that a person is accepting of the consequences of his actions then the person who 'doesn't care' has a genuine power or freedom to do as he pleases. If you really don't care what people think about the clothes you wear, you have the freedom to wear what you want. If it is of no consequence how others react to your behaviour then you have a real power to act as gratuitously, unconventionally or self-indulgently as you like. Of course there comes a point when pushed too far conflict with the law or with acceptable social standards will arise but that is always the price for pushing at the margins.

## CARE AND COMPROMISE

It's only when we start to care about the effects of our actions on other people or on ourselves that our power to act as we want becomes constrained. The moment we start to care, we begin to analyse the risks and possible outcomes, we start to make judgements and then to rationalise our position and start to make compromises. When we begin to worry about where our actions are leading, or the cost, or what we have to leave behind, we can no longer exercise the same freedom of action. The suicide bomber who starts to care about his own life, simply cannot function. The teenager who starts to become fashion conscious no longer has the power to just throw on any old rag-bag of clothes and go out to meet friends. Now that we care, our behaviour inevitably is modified and to the extent that we do care, our freedom of expression and power to do as we please is constrained.

In one sense the Christian who doesn't care is an absolute contradiction. Not only does the Christian have a duty to care in love about the effect of his actions on other people, there is also the need to ensure that his own life is "worthy of the calling to which we are called". Not only that, but the refining process is ongoing as we allow another, superior power to take pre-eminence in our lives. We are not our own, we have been bought with a price, and that knowledge alone is surely enough to convince us that our freedom is now constrained to what God allows rather than what we desire. As we voluntarily submit to God's authority we are obligated to care about God's requirements of us.

## LOSING AND GAINING

Yet in another way, the more submissive we become, the more powerful we become. Paul, that vessel chosen by God for a special purpose, seemed to come close to that ideal of one who submitted to God and through that submission found the absolute power of not caring about his life for its own sake, only caring how that life could best be used to fulfil God's purposes. Isn't there real power in these words of Paul, **"For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."** If I live I shall be doing the work of Christ and glorifying him in my body; and if perchance I shall die, then even better because I will depart to be with Christ. And of course his willingness to live and serve was not conditional on the thought

of some comfortable existence. Even in his imprisonment Paul was effectively able to say that he didn't really care whether he lived or died because he could see abundant blessing in both. Now that is power, but that power is vested in the submissive relationship that Paul enjoyed with his Lord. It is a power that depends on this, **"I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ..."** (Phil 3:7,8)

When we reach that point in our Christian experience, when our maturity is in full bloom, when our desire for the deepest possible identification with our Saviour is overwhelming us, when I am diminished and Christ is pre-eminent, then we have achieved the amazing paradox of taking absolute control over our lives through submission. What Paul says is that he has lost everything, but doesn't care about that loss, because he has gained Christ.

Matthew recorded a series of parables of Jesus. In two of them, recorded in Chapter 13, the kingdom of heaven is likened to 'treasure hidden in a field' and 'fine pearls'. The immediate reaction of the finder of the treasure and the fine pearls, a type of Christ or the gospel, is to "sell all that he has" in order to purchase the 'treasure' of greater value. Now when we find the power to stop being consumed by the prospect of the next material possession and are only concerned with possessing Christ; when we are no longer concerned about projecting our own personality but only want to show Christ living in and through us; when we can stop looking around us at the allurements of the world and being enticed by them and have eyes only for Jesus, the Christ; when we stop living the life that we want to live and start living the life that Christ wants us to live; then we really will have a valid claim to have stopped caring and taken power to ourselves to serve Christ with our lives.

## DYING TO THE WORLD

Paul had this advice for the Christians at Colossae, **"Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on the earth. For you have died and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."** (Col. 3:2,3) Some translations of the latter part of this passage say, 'so far as this world is concerned it is as if we had already died'. And that is the real point. If we have already died to this world, then in the spiritual sense at least we have moved on, the world has lost its hold over us and its influence on us is at the very least greatly diminished and at best has been completely removed.

Can we care so little for this life that we can take the power to transform our lives? Can we focus on the eternal glories of heaven than the fading 'splendour' of the world? Can we find the strength, the courage even, to die to the world and care so little for it that we can free ourselves of its hold? **"For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father but of the world. And the world passes away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides for ever."**

# Word Study SOBRIETY

(Ian S Davidson, Motherwell)

I always like to read Paul's epistle to Titus. It contains one of my favourite passages of Scripture: **"For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared unto all men, teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."** (2:11-14) I once spoke on this passage at a church social gathering and have never forgotten it. I think a book could be written on these four verses alone, never mind the complete letter.

## LIVE SOBERLY

Sobriety, righteousness and godliness have to do with living rightly in relation to ourselves, to others, and to God. Of course, I used to think, as a young Christian, that sobriety was but the antonym of drunkenness. I could not have been more wrong. The word has a far wider meaning. The Greek for soberly is *sophronos* and denotes 'of sound mind'. Vine says that the word, 'suggests the exercise of that self-restraint that governs all passions and desires, enabling the believer to be conformed to the mind of Christ'. Albert Barnes comments: 'It is to have desires and passions well regulated or under proper control'. Adam Clarke writes that the word means, 'having every temper, appetite, and desire, under the government of the Spirit of God'.

Walter Scott was a contemporary of Alexander Campbell. He too came from the Old World. He was born in Moffat, Scotland and educated at Edinburgh University. He turned out to be an outstanding gospel preacher in the United States of America. *The Messiahship* was one of the few books he published in his lifetime. In it, he writes about 'sobriety'. He says: 'Sobriety has respect to ourselves. It means personal purity, personal holiness, or any other thing embraced in keeping our body intact – unstained by evil, drunkenness, tobacco, licentiousness, opium. Also in keeping our souls from lusts, murder, avarice, resentments, the love of pleasure, and whatever defiles the man and mars the beauty and symmetry of his character. And the deep wisdom of our blessed Lord should be carefully noted and remembered here, namely: **"that it is not that which goes into a man that defiles him, but that which comes out of him that defiles a man; for out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies – these are the things that defile the man."** (Matthew: 15:19). How glorious it is in a man to preserve both body and soul intact, pure, holy, and to superintend his character as it works toward perfection! Please note the following additional passages:

- **"For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God has dealt to every man the measure of faith."** (Romans 12:3);
- **"In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with braided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; but (which become women professing godliness) with good works."** (1 Timothy 2:9,10);

- **"A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach..."** (1 Timothy 3:2);
- **"That the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience."** (Titus 2:2);
- **"That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children."** (Titus 2:5);
- **"But the end of all things is at hand: be you therefore sober and watch unto prayer."** (1 Peter 4:7).



## DRINK AND DRUG ABUSE

I like what Walter Scott wrote on this subject. He includes drunkenness and opium or drugs in the things to be avoided. Drunkenness and drug taking do not equate with 'soundness of mind'. Drunkenness is serious problem in the modern world. Some people treat it as a laugh, but it is certainly no joke. A word with the police, paramedics, battered wives, etc. will prove the point.

Binge drinking, especially among young people, is now at epidemic proportions in Britain. The statistics are frightening. 1 in 13 people in Britain is dependent upon alcohol. 37% of young men and 23% of young women binge-drink regularly. 1 in 4 beds in male hospital wards is occupied by someone with an alcohol-related illness. 10 people a week are killed as a result of drink driving. The social and financial consequences of these figures are incalculable. And it is getting worse every year. No wonder God's word has always condemned drunkenness. In fact, Paul saw it as a work of the flesh (Galatians 5:21). The great apostle once pointed out to the Corinthians that drunkards, among many others, **"will not inherit the kingdom of God."** (1 Corinthians 6: 10). God's word could not be clearer on the matter.

Drug abuse is also on the increase in the Western World. Many countries are virtually at war with the organised drug gangs. The latter only care about money and think nothing of the destruction they are bringing to individuals, families, towns, villages, etc. Governments are finding it increasingly difficult to overcome the world's drug traffickers. Bribery, violence and corruption are the traffickers' stock-in-trade. I once did a special study on drugs. I read about the effects of cocaine (also known as "snow" or "coke"); heroin ("junk" or "dope"); LSD (which stands for lysergic acid diethylamide); cannabis ("pot" or "grass" or "weed"); amphetamines ("speed"); barbiturates, etc. Why people experiment with such substances is beyond me. I recently read an interview with Al Jardine, an ex-Beach Boy. He said of the past: 'Everyone was high but me. I was the only one who didn't take drugs. I was the square...' I admire him for that. It's never easy being the odd one out. Francis Schaeffer once quoted a verse from an anonymous poem. It reads:

*King Heroin is my shepherd, I shall always want,  
He maketh me to lie down in the gutters.  
He leadeth me beside the troubled waters.  
He destroyeth my soul.*

Schaeffer went on to say: 'Playing with drugs is foolish, as well as wrong.' I could not have put it better myself.



## ONE FINAL POINT.

I note that some books talk about the saints of God being 'intoxicated by the Spirit'. This, frankly, is nonsense. People can be intoxicated by the spirit of the bottle, but not by the Spirit of God. The word "toxic" refers to poison. The Holy Spirit does not poison us, He cleanses us. He also helps us to "live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world".

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

# Balaam's Ways (3)

(Brian J Boland)

The first and the last (Revelation 1.17) instructed John to write messages to the seven churches. The church at Ephesus is commended for their hatred of the deeds of the Nicolaitans which Christ also says he hates. The church at Pergamum is chastised for having within it those who hold the teaching of both Balaam and the Nicolaitans. The church of Thyatira, is *condemned* for tolerating the woman Jezebel; and is warned by the Son of God that those who do not repent of following her that he will **"strike her children dead."** (Revelation 2.23 ESV).

This hardly gels with the current view of the love of God. But the absolute definition of love is – **"Anyone who does not love does not know God because God is love"** (1 John 4:8 ESV) Or as the OT says **"The Lord your God is in your midst a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love."** (Zephaniah 3.17 ESV).

In spite of being the absolute of love, we read that God also hates. In order for us to abide in his love we must hate the things that he hates (see Proverbs 8:13), **"There are six things that the LORD hates, seven that are an abomination to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that make haste to run to evil, a false witness who breathes out lies, and one that sows discord among brothers."** (Proverbs 6:16-19 ESV) We should do well to understand that God has a hatred of all things that lead his children to stray. This includes the teachings and practices of Balaam, Jezebel and the Nicolaitans (Revelation 2.6-21).

Balaam taught Balak how to entice Israel into sexual immorality (Numbers 25 1-9). This led directly to Israel worshipping other gods and 24,000 deaths. Two hundred years later the practice had crept in again because Israel had ceased to obey Gods voice (Judges 6.10) and Gideon destroyed the altar to Baal (Judges 6.28). Then 300 years on king Ahab, incited by his wife Jezebel (1Kings 21.25) erected an altar to Baal. But Elijah, on Gods instructions assembled 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah and told them to call their gods bring fire down to consume the sacrifices made to them, all without avail. But Elijah soaking his altar with water called on the **"Lord God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel"**(1 Kings 18.37 ESV) to send fire down, the fire came down and consumed the offering and all the people said **"The Lord, he is God: The Lord, he is God"** (1 Kings 18.39 ESV)

Elijah then instructed king Ahab to slaughter all the false prophets. One would think that after such a demonstration of God's power that Elijah would have been fearless against all future opponents, but such was the personality of Ahab's wife, Jezebel, that he was forced to flee from her wrath. (1 Kings 19) Ahab was shortly after put to death by the Syrians with the dogs licking his blood (1 Kings 22.29-) Within 5 years his wife Jezebel was thrown down to Jehu and her body trampled underfoot by his horses and the dogs consumed her with the exception of her skull, feet and palms of her hand (2Kings 9.35) just as Elijah had prophesied around fifteen years earlier. (1Kings 21.23)

Of the likes of Jezebel, Paul wrote, **"such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ by the spirit of our God"** (1Corinthians 6.11 ESV); This shows that as in Thyatira (Revelation 2.22), all can repent of the sins listed in the warning of the earlier verse- **"Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers... will inherit the kingdom of God"** (1 Corinthians. 6.9-10 ESV)



Early last year I answered a question about the Holy Spirit, and it appears that the Holy Spirit continues to be a subject that arouses considerable interest, because I have received several more questions on the same topic. I freely admit that I find this encouraging! It is encouraging because I remember a time when Churches of Christ were actually accused by certain denominations – (quite wrongly, of course), – of not believing in the Holy Spirit.

I suspect that this was because, at that time, there was so much erroneous teaching emerging from so-called 'Pentecostal' and 'charismatic' groups, and so many false claims being made by them, that our own brethren appeared to be reluctant to speak about the Spirit, lest they be misunderstood and regarded as 'digressive'!

Over the next few months, d.v., prompted by the questions, we shall be looking again at what the Scriptures teach concerning the Holy Spirit, in the hope that the study may prove both useful and encouraging.



THIS MONTH'S QUESTION: JOEL'S PROPHECY - JOEL 2; 28,

***When God said, through the prophet Joel, that the Spirit would be poured out on 'all flesh', was this fulfilled in Acts 2, in the case of the apostles, and in Acts 10 with the household of Cornelius, or does the prophecy also apply to us today?***

Before getting to grips with the question, I think it is important that we should remind ourselves of the place which the Holy Spirit occupies in God's plan of salvation, and that we should also recognize that Acts 2 marks the commencement of the age of His ministry, the age in which we now live and understand the significance of His ministry in God's plan of salvation.

#### THE SPIRIT OF GOD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT AGE.

In Old Testament times the 'Spirit of God' did not have a *constant* ministry, so far as the nation of Israel was concerned. For instance, He is never said to 'indwell' or 'fill' that nation which was created at Sinai by the enacting of the Mosaic Covenant, in the way He is said to indwell the new people of God that were created by the New Covenant, ratified by the death of Jesus.

Instead, the Old Testament scriptures reveal that there were *special periods of time* when *specialty chosen individuals* were inspired and motivated by the Spirit of God, to enable them to fulfil *special purposes*. But He had no *constant* ministry, and *no special relationship* with the individuals who made up God's ancient people.

#### THE SCRIPTURES REVEAL HOW THE PLAN OF REDEMPTION UNFOLDED

- 1st. The decision to make Man's salvation possible *originated* in the mind of God Himself, (1st John 4; 9,16).
- 2nd. The plan of salvation was *put into effect* by the Word of God, who "appeared at the end of the age to put away sin..." (Heb. 9:26. Gal. 4: 4-5. John.1: 1 & 14).
- 3rd. When the redemptive work of Christ had been accomplished, the Holy Spirit came to *make the Gospel effective*, (John.16: 7-11).

But the Spirit's ministry could not commence until the Lord Jesus had returned to the Father. This is made clear in John.7: 39, and in John 14:26, where the Lord speaks of "*the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name*".

We see, then, that each member of the Godhead, that is, God, the Word of God and the Spirit of God, or, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, are all involved in our redemption. And today, wherever and whenever the Gospel is faithfully preached, the Holy Spirit will seek to produce conviction of the hearts of men and women, on the three important matters stated by the Lord Jesus Himself in the last passage mentioned, *because the Gospel Age is the Age of the Spirit's ministry*.

The prophet Joel, therefore, was predicting the coming of a time when those individuals who received the forgiveness of their sins through faith in, and obedience to, the Christ, would also be granted God's '*dorea*' - His '*free*' or '*extra*' gift of the Holy Spirit, as an '*indwelling Presence*', enabling them to become the people He intends them to become.

It is to this coming of the Holy Spirit that Peter referred on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:38). In explaining how he and his fellow apostles were able to speak in languages they had never learned, Peter said, "This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel".

BUT THE QUESTION IS, 'WHAT DID PETER MEAN BY 'POURED OUT ON ALL FLESH'?"

- 1) *He did NOT mean that 'all flesh' would receive the 'measure' of the Spirit then being demonstrated by the apostles. (See John 3:34, 'measure' is from 'metron' and means 'capacity').*

The apostles' 'baptism in the Spirit' was something uniquely promised to them by the Lord Jesus Himself, and it was given in order to equip them to undertake an equally unique responsibility as His 'witnesses', (Acts 1:8). Their baptism - their 'overwhelming' in the Spirit - would: -

- *Guide* them into all truth.
- Give them *total recall* of all the things Jesus had taught them.
- Reveal to them *new truths*, John 14:13, 26, and,
- '*Clothe*' them with *power*, Luke 24:49.

Such promises were never made to anyone else in all of biblical history, and, regardless of what some denominations may claim, no-one today receives the 'baptism of the Spirit'.

- 2) *Peter meant that ALL who accepted Jesus as the Christ and submitted to Him in obedience, would also receive God's gift of the Spirit. This means that the Holy Spirit is God's own gift. It does not relate to a gift from the Holy Spirit, nor does it relate to the 'gifts of the Spirit', the 'charismata', or miraculous 'grace gifts', about which Paul wrote to the Corinthian Church, in 1 Cor. Chapters 12-14.*

That God's gift of the Spirit is available to all, is clear from the fact that Peter said the promise was made '*to you and your children*' - (the Jews to whom he was then speaking), - '*and to all who are afar off*' - (the non-Jews, or Gentiles). See Eph.2: 17. In Acts 5:32, he further states that God gives this gift '*to those who obey Him*'.

- 3) This '*free*' or '*extra gift*' is *the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit*. He '*dwells in you*', (1 Cor.3:16), so that '*Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have (received) from God*', (1 Cor.6:19).

Furthermore, 'you are in the Spirit if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him', Rom.8:9.

## IN SUMMARY, THEN

*ALL obedient believers receive the 'Gift of the Spirit'. That is, the Holy Spirit is GOD'S own gift. (Rom.8: 11). This is 'the Spirit who dwells in you'. (See also 1st Cor. 3:16 and 6:19).*

*The Miraculous gifts, were gifts which the Holy Spirit HIMSELF bestowed on certain individuals, and, according to 1st Cor.12: 11, the Spirit's gifts are given 'as He chooses', or, 'as He wills', and were not given to everyone. This question, "Do all speak in tongues?" clearly implied by Paul in his rhetorical questions in 1st Cor.12: 29-30,*

*The purpose of the miraculous gifts was to establish the truth and build up the Church. (Rom. 1:11). Paul longed to visit the Church in Rome, to impart some spiritual gift 'to strengthen you'. He was writing about a 'measure' of the Spirit beyond the usual 'gift of the Spirit', which these Roman Christians had already received when they were baptized into Christ. (See Rom. 6).*

*These spiritual gifts were bestowed on believers by the laying on of the hands of the apostles. (Rom.1: 11 again). Read also, Paul to Timothy, in 2ndTim. 1:6, and notice, 'by the laying on of my hands'.*

*Only Apostles had the power to lay on hands, to impart spiritual gifts. In Acts 8 we read that Philip went to Samaria to preach the Gospel, (vv. 4ff.) There he displayed miraculous power, performing 'signs and wonders' which endorsed his preaching of the gospel.*

The Samaritans believed and were baptized, (v.12).

The apostles in Jerusalem heard of their conversion and 'sent down Peter and John' (v.14), who laid hands on the converts.

Peter himself stated that baptism into Christ brings 'the gift of the Holy Spirit'.

Since the Samaritans had already been baptized into Christ, this imposition of the hands of the apostles was an *additional blessing*, and was followed by a demonstration of gifts of the Spirit, which *Simon must have witnessed* and which impressed him so powerfully that he offered to buy 'this power' (vv.18-19).

Acts 6:6 records that Philip, the evangelist, had, himself, already received the laying on of apostolic hands. Yet, although he performed acts of power in Samaria, he was not able to do what the apostles did. He could not pass on the spiritual gifts to others. Had he been able to do so, the visit of the apostles, Peter and John, would have been unnecessary. This surely means that the age of miraculous spiritual gifts was limited to the lifetime of the apostles and those on whom they laid their hands, and it ended with their deaths.

**A final thought.** Remember that the Holy Spirit is God's *Gift!* But a gift is only a gift when it is accepted. And the Holy Spirit was promised by Jesus as the Holy *Guest!* But He will not enter uninvited!

### Questions to:

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# The Growing Church 4

## The Unified Church (Alastair Ferrie, Dundee)



The Church is not always as unified as it should be. Even the Philippian Church which was Paul's joy and crown, Paul wrote in Phil 4, I beseech that Euodia and Syntyche should agree in the Lord. These two women in Paul's almost model Church were having a disagreement which was causing disunity in the body of Christ.

Have you ever been in the situation where you were afraid to invite a non Christian along to Church because you were unsure whether the Church would display the kind of unity that it ought? I have. And this highlights a significant fact that fits into this series of lessons...

- **A divided Church cannot grow.**
- **Only a unified Church can be a growing Church!**

Turn again to our text for this series, the fourth chapter of the Ephesian epistle. Read it again for the theme of the unified Church. Here we see a picture of a unified Church! This is the ideal picture of the Church, together, one in purpose and direction, growing together and feeding one another and hence ready to shed light to a dark world.

**However, a disunited Church is one which is as dark as the world is and can shed no light.**

### **A. Maintaining the Unity of The Spirit.**

Note the principle is stated in v3. **"eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."** This is a picture of the Church which is as one as the Spirit Himself is one. **The question is implied, how can the Church led by the Spirit be disunited? "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God."** (Rom 8:14).

If we are truly those who are led by the One Spirit then we must be one, by definition. Paul writes to the Corinthians that we who are many are made one body. (1 Cor. 10:16-17). Because we have all been baptized into the one body, and we have all become members of that one body of Christ, how could we be anything else but one. (1 Cor. 12:12-13)

Throughout we see that we are led by one Spirit, placed in the one Body, sharing the same loaf, drinking of the one blood of the covenant, drinking of the one Spirit.

We are getting the picture that the Church was designed to be a unified Church...

We need this for our own sake that our experience of the grace of God will be enhanced and not hindered. We need it for the sake of the Church that it may grow as it ought, and we need it for the sake of the lost for how will they find us if we are so busy fighting with ourselves that we cannot truly present the love of God in Christ to them. 1 Pet 3:8-12.

## **B. The Seven Fold Platform of Unity:**



I have preached on this passage as a doctrinal statement and I do not retract any of that preaching. It is the seven-fold platform concerning which if we can have unity about these things, then we can truly be one. I have preached on this passage saying that if we can unite all believers on these essential issues then we can have the unity of all believers on the basis of the Bible and the

Bible alone. However in this article I am asking if there is a slightly different way of looking at this.

What is the passage really talking about? It is talking about the growing Church. And the Church can be a growing Church if it is a united Church. Paul is not discussing denominationalism, which has not really begun as he writes. You might say that he is anticipating denominationalism and perhaps that is so.

It was written to the Church of Christ, the one Church then in existence. Bearing that in mind let us look at it again. Let us think about it as a passage talking about the ideal picture of the Church as one in which there is unity and through that unity there will come great strength and great growth in the Church.

**SEVEN things we share as one.** Seven things that unite us together. Seven things that make sure that there is a sense of oneness which will enhance the unity of the Church and hence provide the growing Church with the perfect environment for growth.

### **1. One Body.**

It is not just that we belong to the same club, or that we live in the same locality, but it goes further than that, we are part of the same body. And this is the greatest sense of belonging that there can be, if we are part of the same organism. We don't have to remind the hand that it is part of the body... it senses that all on its own. It is organically connected to every other part of the body and hence shares certain things with all other parts of the body... (1 Cor. 12:14-27)

- **If the body is cold then the hand is cold**
- **If the body is undernourished then the hand is undernourished**
- **If the body has no shelter then the hand has no shelter**
- **If the body is injured then the hand stands or falls with the rest of the body because of that injury.**

It is not that we are part of the Body because we are one, it is that we are one because we are part of the body. There is allegiance, there is fellow feeling, there is identity, there is sharing, there is common welfare. And all because we are part of that body. This passage is not about the denominational world, it is about the Church and it is saying for the Church to be healthy and thriving and growing there has to be this acceptance of belonging to the one Body.

## 2. One Spirit:

He is of course talking about the Holy Spirit. And the point is that there will be unity when people are led by the same Spirit, in the same direction and with the same purpose. How could there be anything else? See Rom 8:14-17.

How can there be discord between two people who are being led by the Spirit of God? **If there is discord we have to come to the conclusion that one or both are not allowing themselves to be led fully by the Spirit of God.** You will notice that I have said one or both. It is possible that it is one sided. It is more usual that there will be problems on both sides. And when the Church is as it should be, there is unity, and that unity is based on all being led by the one Spirit.

## 3. One Hope:

**Have you ever thought that it would be terrific to be in heaven if it weren't for the fact that some of the brethren might be there?** Have you ever thought that at times the Lord has a terrible propensity for being that bit too gracious in extending forgiveness to certain people who certainly don't merit it? And yet if truth be told, none of us merit it. And if the Lord were to draw lines like that there is nothing to say which side of the line we should be on.

We are in this thing together, we are on a journey to the same location, to the same destination. (John 14:1-4) This is the one hope that belongs to our call. We have an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for us. (1 Pet 1:3-5).

There is nothing that binds people together better than the realization that we are all on the same journey to the same destination. Suppose you were sitting in some airport somewhere waiting for a delayed flight and you got talking to some of the other passengers waiting around... if one of the passengers was also traveling to the same city in Britain as you, don't you know you would soon be in conversation with that person, you would have discussed what part of the city each of you came from and details about other parts of the intervening journey. Because you shared the same destination there is a sense of oneness with that other person. **Listen, we share the same eternal destination!**

## 4. One Lord:

We have the same Lord. That is a word that we bandy around a great deal in religious circles without ever taking into consideration the significance of it. The idea of Lord is the idea of Master. It carries with it the idea of obedience, subservience, allegiance, loyalty. That Master has ownership. (Lke 6:46-49)

When we acknowledge Jesus as Lord, we acknowledge Him as Master and we owe Him absolute allegiance. And if I have the concerns of Jesus uppermost in my priorities and you have the concerns of Jesus uppermost in your priorities, then this creates unity... a oneness which benefits and blesses the Church and allows it to grow.

**The problem comes when I allow my own concerns and interests to come before His in the Church.**

## 5. One Faith:

What is Paul saying?

- That there are not many equally valid faiths but **ONE FAITH!**
- That the faith was not an evolving ever-changing faith but the one faith that was delivered and taught by the apostles and this was to be regarded as **THE ONE FAITH.** (Jude 3-4)

All of that is true, but I am not sure that was what Paul wanted us to take out of Eph 4. This passage emphasizes the environment in which the growing Church exists. The point Paul is making here is that the one Church, the one Body of Christ is bound together by the one faith.

It is because we share a common faith that we are together at all. That is what brought us here together. It is not that we share a common taste in clothes, or houses, or furniture, or cars, or music, or art. It is because we share a common faith. **You see the point is that we share this life changing faith and that is what makes us one!**

## 6. One Baptism:

In Churches of Christ we have loved this passage because of this one statement. I am not retracting anything here. There is but one baptism, and it is by immersion, and it is for remission of sins. And passage after passage in the New Testament makes that absolutely clear. The point I am making is that I don't think that was the point that Paul was hoping to make by this passage. The point is there as a by-product if you like of that statement. But that was not what Paul intended to impress upon us by Eph 4.

Paul is arguing that the oneness of the Church is clearly seen in the one baptism. (Rom 6:1-11)

Our baptism presents some pretty cogent arguments concerning the nature of the Church. This is the point that Paul is making in Rom 6 and the same point is being argued here in Eph 4.

- **Baptism says dead to sin.**
- **Baptism says put into Christ.**
- **Baptism says new life in Christ = born again.**
- **Baptism says united with Christ.**
- **Baptism says death of the old man and the old way.**
- **Baptism says freedom from the bondage to sin.**
- **Baptism says living with Christ.**
- **Baptism says brought from death to life.**
- **Baptism says being alive to God.**

And the thing is, says Paul there is only ONE BAPTISM. You have all experienced the ONE BAPTISM INTO CHRIST. **Every member of the growing Church is united with every other member of the growing Church by means of their ONE BAPTISM INTO THE ONE CHRIST.**

## 7. One God and Father:

Lastly we come to one God! We serve the one God. But more than this, Paul does not stop there he says **"one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all."** WE have one Father.

When I came into the Church at first, I thought it really sounded strange to hear that brother so and so would now lead the Church in prayer, brother so and so would guide us around the Lord's table. It's almost as if every man in the Church had the same first name. Just like in Glasgow every man there is called Jimmy. But in the Church every man there is called brother. And it is tempting to treat this as some kind of courtesy title only.

But it is never meant to be a courtesy title. It is a statement of fact. That the oneness of the Church is based on this simple fact that we have the same Father. This makes us family. This makes us brother or sister. And we have to remember that and truly believe it to be so. We have the same Father and that makes us family! He is the same Father of us all! (That is the phrase used here!)

**And that one Father is above all!!** i.e. for each and every one of us we honour the same Father whom we recognize to be above us. I honour this one Father as being above me. You honour that same Father as being above you! And that brings the Church into oneness. Because we respect the same Father.

**And that one Father is through all!!** i.e. that one Father is working through us all. Now wouldn't it be utterly and completely ridiculous if the Church were not unified... how could the one Father be working through us all if we are all disunited, wanting different things, believing different things, going in different directions. Don't be ridiculous says Paul. The growing Church is one where the Father is working through all!

**And that one Father is in all!!!** i.e. that one Father is living in each one of us and if we cannot respect one another for anything else then we need to respect this that the one Father is abiding in each one of us.

### Conclusion:

What we are seeing is that there are a host of things that make the Church unified.

- **We are part of the one Body of Christ, organically connected to one another**
- **We are led by the one Spirit of God**
- **We are travelling in the one direction to the one destination**
- **We have one Master and Lord**
- **We share the same faith**
- **We are united in the same baptism**
- **We have the same Father.**

And as this unified Church, this provides the right environment for the Church to grow. Any other environment will stifle growth and hold the Church back. **But in the context of the unified Church, growth is inevitable.**

## News and Information

### ***News from Nepal***

Many readers will be aware of the visits that Sister Carole Ashurst from Stretford has made to Nepal to provide health care and spiritual sustenance to Christian communities. Nepal can be hostile territory for all Christians and they continue on in the face of opposition. It is a self-denying work that Carole does in Nepal. She has asked that her thanks for the financial support that she receives from Churches and individuals is expressed through the SS. Sister Gretchen Ashurst has also written that the Churches really appreciate the help that is given and would welcome letters from congregations and Christians in the UK. Carole is back from her most recent trip and below is a report from the Babar Mahal Church of Christ, Kathmandu. The report is reproduced largely as received.

#### **Church of Christ in Nepal**

Nepal is predominantly and constitutionally an only Hindu Kingdom of this world. Out of its 20.35 million people, 86% are Hindu, 8% Buddhist, 3% Islam, 1% Animist (Kirant), Others 1.25% and 0.75% Christians. Out of this Christian population there are only 2000+ people belonging to the Church of Christ.

Establishment of the Lord's Church in Nepal goes back to the early 70's. But at that time only few people were converted and they were mostly from Kathmandu, the capital city of Nepal. Actual evangelising of the country was started from early 90's when brothers like Charles Scott, Harvey Hasha and Mike Brooks started their work. These respected and widely admired brothers started their work with the help of a few local Nepali brethren and they were able

to establish several congregations in Kathmandu and other surrounding areas. At present there are 50+ congregations in the country. Nepalese congregations are mostly small and they are not self-supported. Most converts are economically and socially weak and ignored by government and society because of their background.

The Babar Mahal Church of Christ started to worship on March 15th, 1995 in a small rented hall at Bagbazar of Kathmandu city. The young, energetic and enthusiastic people in Christ started it and at that time there were 8 members. Though the conversion rate is very low in Kathmandu, at present there are 45 members with 40+ people attending morning and evening worship each Sunday. The congregation is doing evangelical work in the local area around Kathmandu and in other parts of Nepal. At present there are around 10 congregations in east Nepal and 14 in Makwanpur and Chitawan area and 500+ members are in them. Most of the members of the Churches are economically weak.

There are several needs in the local church. There are the old, widows, orphans and needy and sick people in Churches in Nepal. The Churches in east Nepal and Kathmandu need to pay rent. We need to supply the Bible and song-books to those areas where we are working and where the members cannot buy them themselves. There are brothers and sisters in Christ who want to go to every corner of Kathmandu valley and Nepal to teach the Bible and preach the glorious gospel of our Lord. Your prayers will certainly help us to accomplish our goals in the Lord. Please pray for Nepal and for us.

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## Sister's Page

It has been suggested that the SS should contain a page by Sisters for Sisters. The SS has long accepted articles from Sisters and this seems to be a natural development. However though I am happy to run such a page in the magazine, I am not competent to edit it. So if there is a Sister out there who is willing to sub-edit a page of this kind then please contact me. It isn't too difficult and access to email makes the receipt and submission of content quite straightforward (though it isn't essential). Is anyone up to the challenge? My contact details are on the back page.

***(At the time of writing I have had no response to this suggestion. Is there really no sister willing and able to take this up? Robert)***

## Prayers Please

I understand that Bro. Brian Boland who has been submitting articles on 'Balaams Ways' has recently suffered a heart attack and at the time of writing is in hospital. I'm sure that readers will join with me in wishing Brian a full and

speedy recovery. Please remember Brian and his family in your prayers.

## Coming Events

### TRANENT SOCIAL

The **Tranent, Scotland** annual social Will be held (DV) on **Saturday 20th March 2004**. The speakers will be Ian Davidson and Jim Sinclair and a warm welcome is extended to all.

John Colgan, Secretary

### WIGAN FELLOWSHIP WEEKEND

#### LONGSHOOT, WIGAN

**Friday, April 30th –  
Monday, May 3rd 2004**

#### "MATTERS OF FIRST IMPORTANCE"

Bi-ennial Fellowship Weekend is to be held over weekend of Friday, April 30th to Monday, May 3rd 2004. Our plans are now well advanced and speakers are working on their assignments.

A full programme of events will be announced shortly. But you can be assured of a weekend of excellent teaching and fellowship.

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