

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 God's revelation and a 'eureka' moment

Isn't it great when something 'clicks'? When something that just doesn't seem to want to come together suddenly falls into place and there is that wonderful sense of satisfaction, maybe even elation that the jigsaw is at last beginning to take shape. In fact those of you who do jigsaws or crosswords will certainly know the feeling of finding the piece or the word that suddenly allows you to rush on to complete the puzzle after all the laborious

spadework has been done.

Students may well experience this in academic studies when concepts that are being explained just don't 'gel' to form a coherent explanation or deliver a clear understanding of what is being taught. Until, that is, some insight emerges that helps to complete the picture and move the student on to new levels of understanding. In the sporting field, a gymnast may struggle with a particular move and the perfection of that move may prove elusive, until someone maybe comes along with a minor adjustment to technique that suddenly allows everything to fall into place. I'm no scientist but I guess that a major element of scientific research works on the '90% perspiration and 10% inspiration' model in that a tremendous amount of time is spent in the absolutely crucial, but grinding, work of gradually eliminating variables, trying and discounting theories, examining cause and effect until a pattern emerges that can be empirically tested to demonstrate the reliability of the work. The cry of 'eureka' (translated "I have found it" commonly attributed to Archimedes sitting in his bath and being struck by the principle of the displacement of water) has entered into common language, signifying that a breakthrough has been made or a conclusion reached. Or perhaps in other circumstances it isn't a sudden 'eureka' moment that is experienced, but the gradual dawning of a realisation that changes forever one's

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outlook on a matter – or indeed on life itself. But even 'eureka' moments can be double-edged in that the elation of a personal realisation may well lead to frustration at an inability to pass on the understanding that has been gained at a personal level to a fellow student.

Revelation and faith

As 21st century Christians and Bible scholars we have the great privilege of being able, at a glance almost, to have the beginning, middle and end of the unfolding story of the gospel at our disposal though, of course, we still have the glorious expectation of the complete fulfilment of everything that God has promised to His children to anticipate. I'm not at all suggesting that the fact of its availability naturally means that we all have full understanding – that would simply be to fly in the face of all the available evidence when consideration is given to the vast array of opinion and comment that has been generated by the revelation of the gospel. And even Paul spoke to the 1st century Christians about seeing through a glass dimly during this present age. What it does do (perhaps to the detriment of our focus on the real and central message of the revelation) is to allow us the capacity for a much more studied and forensic analysis of what has been revealed. I'm far from sure that this is universally a good thing though. On the face of it the complete scriptural record that we have available to us should logically make our acceptance of the revelation much easier as we see the harmony and progression of the revelation of the gospel. But in reality it seems that the increasingly sophisticated methods of analysis and study are gradually placing a greater emphasis on 'reason' as a basis for spiritual understanding rather than faith and whilst Christian evidences are useful, they will never replace faith as the basis for our belief in God. Even when the clearest 'evidence' of God was made manifest in the world, God the Son, it did not lead to universal belief. Instead, by some at least, it led only to a vicious and relentless campaign to label the physical manifestation of God in the world as a liar and blasphemer. The challenges that surround mankind's relationship with God do change as the environment in which that relationship is worked out change and I believe that 'reason' as the basis for belief rather than faith is one of today's great challenges for Christians. And in this respect nothing has changed because as Paul wrote to the Galatians, "The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the Gospel unto Abraham..." (Gal. 3:8)

God revealed

The way in which God has revealed Himself has taken different forms throughout the ages. He is revealed in the creation and in mankind. He has been revealed through the Scriptures and, of course, most strikingly in His manifestation in the flesh. At other times He revealed Himself in what are commonly referred as the 'theophanies' – special manifestations of God to human beings in specific circumstances and generally to individuals ('theo', God and 'phan', to show). God is far from one-dimensional and He has made Himself known to, and led, mankind in ways that have been appropriate to the circumstances and I am firmly of the belief that God has ordained and fulfilled a gradual and purposeful revelation of His nature and His 'plan for the fullness of time' so that all the generations of mankind would have the opportunity to demonstrate faith in God. Nevertheless just as the 'great men of faith' spoken of in the Hebrew letter as demonstrations to a backsliding people of the true

virtue of faith "did not receive what was promised, since God had foreseen something better for us ...", so we, even with the benefit of a more complete revelation, "now see in a mirror dimly (and)... know in part" but have the promise that a time is coming when we, "will understand fully, even as I have been fully understood."

As I wrote earlier the fact of the one revelation, albeit that it has taken many forms and has emerged over many generations, has not led to a homogeneity of thought and practice in matters of spirituality and relationship with God. One of the things that I have become convinced about over the years is that just as our backgrounds, culture, life experiences and personalities differ, so will the precise nature of the relationships that we build; and what we expect from those relationships will differ. This doesn't make one right and the other wrong it just makes them different, but potentially equally as valid and fulfilling. The other obvious fact as well is that relationships are dynamic rather than static organisms. They evolve as time goes on and as more information (revelation) becomes available to us we understand more of what makes the other person or group of people 'tick'.

Just a couple of examples here of what I'm driving at. You may know that you are an entirely trustworthy person but someone who has a background and history of their own trust being abused by others is naturally going to find it hard to display trust in you until some kind of experience has been built up; because of their past experience they will be naturally cautious and suspicious. By the same token, until you know the history of the individual concerned you may feel quite disappointed and concerned at the lack of trust shown in you; but once you **do** know the history you will no doubt redouble your efforts to ensure that confidence in you is well placed. That dynamic is repeated endlessly and in many different guises in all of our experiences. Just for one moment, bring that into the 'evangelism' context. We talk very naturally of God the Father as a wholly loving and forgiving person. But think about the person whose experience of 'father' has been abusive and violent – isn't it natural that the individual concerned may take a little longer than we imagine it should do to be fully trusting of God as the loving Father, because their experience of 'father' is so very different?

'Eureka' – saved by God

The revelatory process is based on our knowledge, understanding and insights into those matters that we are concerned with and hopefully that applies all the more with regard to our quest for a deeper and deeper understanding of what God has ordained and purposed. Which brings us nicely back to where this article started because I am sure that all serious Bible students have experienced those occasions when some new spiritual enlightenment has emerged that has allowed some hitherto 'cloudy' perspective on God's revelation to become so much more real. In concluding this article I want to share with you what I consider one of my most meaningful 'eureka' moments in matters spiritual.

It has long been my understanding that the Godhead consists of the three persons of God – that is, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Now the idea is well established in Christian thought that when mankind sinned against God in the Garden of Eden the relationship between man and God became broken, as is the reality that the relationship having been broken, there was a need for it to be healed so that reconciliation between man and God could be effected. If mankind was ever

to enjoy a fruitful relationship with God again, then reconciliation between man and God simply had to take place. What must be stressed here is that it was man that needed to be reconciled to God and not the other way round. As W E Vine explains: "Not once is God said to be reconciled. The enmity is alone on our part. It was we who needed to be reconciled to God, not God to us, and it is propitiation (*that is the appeasement of God or the making of God well-disposed again towards man - Ed*), which His righteousness and mercy have provided, that makes the reconciliation possible to those who receive it." The problem of course was that although mankind had been the cause of the enmity between man and God through disobedience, mankind had absolutely no capacity within his own power to restore the relationship with God. God's righteous anger at sin and the effects of sin had to be dealt with and set aside in order for reconciliation to be made available to man, and nothing that man was ever going to be able to do would ever be sufficient to deal with God's anger.

Just look again at that definition of propitiation – the appeasement of God or the making of God well-disposed again towards man, because it is fundamental to the gift of reconciliation that God has made available.

So the remarkable scenario that presented itself was that God had created mankind in His own image and had given him the perfect environment in which to enjoy relationship with God. However man is disobedient and incurs the wrath of God and is banished from that perfect environment. Nevertheless God remains committed to enjoying a fruitful relationship with His highest creation and from the moment that Adam and Eve are banished from the Garden sets in motion the means of salvation and reconciliation – the revelation of which we referred to earlier. The stunning aspect of this, the element that sets the Gospel aside from any other action in history, is the means by which God chose to bring this about. God the Father sent God the Son into the world to be the vicarious sacrifice for mankind. God was aggrieved and before the reconciliation could be effected God had to be appeased. And the means of that appeasement? God the Son! Yes, God set aside His own wrath; God dealt with his own anger. God did not send a 'substitute' for Himself to achieve our salvation – rather God Himself was sacrificed as our substitute. God was mocked scourged and humiliated. God was charged with blasphemy for claiming to be God. God stooped to his knees and, as a servant, washed the feet of His disciples. God hung on the cross and died and in that unfathomable nature of the 'three-in-one' appealed to the Father for forgiveness towards his accusers and abusers – something that ultimately dawned even upon 'the centurion and those that were with him' who surrounded the cross and finally exclaimed, "Truly this was the Son of God". Quoting Vine again he writes "Through the propitiatory sacrifice of Christ, he who believes upon God is by God's own act delivered from justly deserved wrath, and comes under the covenant of grace." And again: "The expiatory work of the Cross is therefore the means whereby the barrier which sin interposes between God and man is broken down. By the giving up of His sinless life sacrificially, Christ annuls the power of sin to separate between God and the believer."

I can't of course speak for other Bible students, but for me, the knowledge that almighty God, the creator of the universe, not only conceived of the plan of salvation but also, in the Son, executed that plan for our redemption, elevates that gift of reconciling love to a realm beyond all others and makes me stand in awe at the wonder of God's providence.

Thinking Out Loud

Ian S. Davidson: Motherwell

A BIRTHDAY

I turned sixty this year. A lot has happened in the world in this short time. Undoubtedly, there have been tremendous scientific and technological developments for the benefit of all mankind. But I have also seen in this period a rapid decline in man's moral and spiritual well being. To live through the decline and fall of the British Empire has been tough. To live through the dramatic secularisation of the West has been equally tough. The closure of many church buildings, especially in Britain, gives a clear picture of what has been, and is, going on.

Britain today is a pagan society. It is no longer a Christian nation. Only a very small percentage of the British population attends a place of worship on a Sunday. Generally, God is ignored, the Bible neglected and the Church disregarded. Consequently, society is in trouble, not only politically and economically, but also spiritually and morally. The news headlines reveal this fact every day. For example, I remember when murder was an uncommon crime. Now we read about murders constantly, even the murders of innocent children. The crime situation overall is horrendous and it is no wonder that many people are fearful of walking the streets at night. Indeed, I know some people who are fearful of walking the streets in the daytime.

FALSE SCIENCE

I think a lot of pseudo-scientists have a lot to answer for. I was at Edinburgh Zoo recently and they have a building there described as "Living Links: a Primate Behaviour Research Centre". The centre, of course, imposes the theory of evolution upon the visitor. I read all the displays in the building very carefully. The apes, the chimpanzees and the monkeys are all studied so that we humans can come to a better understanding of ourselves. The reason being: our close connection with these animals. The Edinburgh International Science Festival is soon to take place as I write this article. The atheist Richard Dawkins will be there as will Prof. Andrew Whiten, who is Professor of Evolutionary and Development Psychology and Wardlaw Professor of Psychology, University of St Andrews. The blurb from the Festival's advertisement reads: "The ability of humans to build up complex cultures seems to put us on a different plane to other animals. It's what has allowed us to dominate the planet. In recent years, however, long-term studies of other species have revealed various signs of culture. The lecture illustrates highlights of the new discoveries."

Clearly, Darwin's influence is still strong in many scientific quarters. I believe his theory is not just wrong, but also dangerous. Tell people that they are only trousered apes or chattering chimpanzees and people, in the end, are going to start living like animals. Where then is the basis of morality? Clearly, it is sought in nature and not

God. Consequently, these people might adopt such "isms" as Epicureanism, hedonism, humanism, rationalism, naturalism and atheism, which, I strongly believe, are to the detriment of our world. Alexander Campbell once wrote: "Now what has dreamy scepticism or presumptuous unbelief to offer, as an apology for itself, in vindication of its position, or as a substitute for Christianity? The light of nature, the light of reason, the dictates of conscience!! What flimsy sophistry! Where is the light of nature found? And who in pagandom has eyes to see it! This light of reason, these dictates of conscience, where are they found? Show me, produce me one example of the power of this light of nature, this light of reason, these dictates of conscience! Show me this eye of reason with this light of nature, working faith in God; working out Christian civilisation, refinement of manners, temperance, justice, public virtue, and humanity; to say nothing of piety and the love and admiration of purity of God! and I will lend a willing ear to such a demonstration. But the animals of the world and the experiences of the present generation afford no such spectacles." Although Campbell wrote these words one hundred and eighty years ago, they still stand up today as a challenge to our generation.

BACK TO THE BIBLE

Andrew Marr, the broadcaster, is a great admirer of Darwin and his works. He says that, following Darwin's so-called revelations on natural selection, there is no going back. He actually uttered these words in Westminster Abbey, London, where Darwin is interred. Actually, Marr could not be more wrong. I believe that all men and women must get back to the Bible to find truth, life and hope. In other words, to go forward people must first go back – back to The Book the likes of Newton, Faraday and Kelvin believed in, a book that speaks truthfully about the origin of everything. The Bible tells us clearly, plainly and simply how it was, how it is and how it will be. It is a book that can be trusted. It is good book to go and buy, and it is a good book to go by. The Bible is God's written revelation to fallen mankind. It was inspired by the Holy Spirit (2 Timothy 3:16, 17). The Bible has stood the test of time and will survive beyond time. It deserves to be read, studied and digested by every rational human being on earth. Personally, I love reading it and meditating upon it. I love the book because I love the author. One day, I hope to meet Him face to face and thank Him for His written word. I hope to thank the Living Word too, who is Jesus. I urge everyone to take God's word and take God at His word. One hour with the Bible worth a thousand hours with the most august and wisest philosopher on the planet. God's wisdom is the principal thing. Happy is the one who finds this wisdom. Nothing in the whole world compares with it. Nothing!

FINAL THOUGHTS

If the world survives another sixty years, I wonder what things will be like at the end of it. I, of course, will not be here to know. Will things be better or worse? Will the pendulum have swung back to God, His kingdom and His righteousness? Will the Truth be to the fore? Will it be one of the great eras for Christianity? For the sake of my nation and all others, I truly hope so.

How old was Mary?

Rose M Payne

It is not uncommon during the winter holiday season to hear a denominational minister asserting that Mary was a very young girl when she became the mother of Jesus. It seems that some scholars have laid down that Jewish girls of that era were always married at an early age and therefore Mary might have been as young as fifteen. The scriptures, however, seem to indicate that she was old enough to have been an independent young woman.

There is a possibility that Mary might have been an orphan at the time when the angel appeared to her. We read in another context that Mary had a sister (John 19:25), but nothing is said about Mary's parents, although legend has been busy inventing names and circumstances for them.

The angel who appeared to Mary to inform her that that she was to become a mother, also told her about her cousin Elisabeth's pregnancy. This provided Mary with a welcome refuge at a difficult time, since Zacharias and Elisabeth had also received an angelic message and would understand her situation. She decided to go and visit them (Luke 1:39-40) and it appears from the text that she probably went alone. There is no reference to asking permission of her parents, as would surely be the case with a very young girl who lived with her family.

Had Mary been a girl under the care of a father and mother at the time, the angel would also have had to explain the situation to them, as he did later to Joseph (Matt. 1:18-25). This would have been essential since there were penalties laid down in Deuteronomy 22 for an unmarried girl who became pregnant while living in her father's house.

After about three months Mary returned to "her own house" (Luke 2:56) although we should have expected to read "her father's" or "her mother's" house. This again could mean that Mary was an orphan and had inherited the family house. It was laid down in Numbers 36:8 that a daughter who inherited because there was no son in the family must marry someone from the same tribe, so as to keep the patrimony from going into another tribe. In those days, the tribe of Judah had been allocated land near the town of Bethlehem. By the time of the New Testament, Mary and Joseph were living away in Nazareth, but Mary was indeed planning to marry within the same tribe, as both she and Joseph belonged to the tribe of Judah.

Then there followed the summons for Joseph to go to Bethlehem to register for taxation purposes because it was the ancestral town of his forebears. Apparently the Romans did tax women as well as men in certain circumstances, and taxation was usually based on land and produce.

After the birth of Jesus, Mary was still young enough to have at least six more children, who are listed in Matthew 13:55-56. So a reasonable guess would be that she was around the age of 20 when Jesus was born.

A few years later, there are more instances of young women being comparatively independent. Martha and Mary were single women living with their brother, and the references to Martha give an impression of a mature individual (Luke 10:38). There were also women travelling about with the disciples, helping to maintain the work out of gratitude (Luke 8:3), (Luke 23:49).

We should not try to interpret the Bible in the light of later cultures in the Middle East, for the Law of Moses taught respect for women, and this resulted in their having a reasonable degree of freedom. Probably parents arranged marriages for their children, but provided all parties were in agreement, this was not necessarily a bad thing. Where strict seclusion of women is practised, this is not a mark of respect, but of distrust both of womankind and of their neighbours.

Altogether, the position of women as recorded in the New Testament is surprisingly "modern" without going to the present-day extremes of "women's liberation". In the present times, we still have to act so as to deserve respect, as evidently Mary had done when the angel told her "Thou hast found favour with God" (Luke 1:30).

DO NOT BE CONFORMED TO THIS WORLD

Ian Grant (Corby)

Things do not happen in a vacuum and we do not live life in a vacuum. Today, we find ourselves in the situation where in general, not only is Bible study not particularly popular, it does not appear that there is a whole lot of it being done in the Church. There are some exceptions to be sure, but overall, meeting together for Bible study is not riding a wave of popularity. This is true also throughout the denominations and so it is not simply our problem in the Church. Nevertheless, it is our problem in that brethren are meeting less frequently than before and attendance only at Sunday morning worship is rather quickly becoming the norm. Even then some do not bother to stay for the sermon, but instead leave as soon as the Lord's Supper is finished. What Bible classes that are offered are often rather poorly attended compared with the past. It is not unusual for just a hand-full to attend at the Sunday morning Bible study and, if there are any meetings scheduled, Sunday evening and mid-week meetings often fare even worse.

WHY THE CHANGE?

What possible reason could there be for such a big change over the last twenty or so years? Why is Bible study on the outer? Let me suggest that one reason why Bible study is being let go is that we simply do not see any need for it. Like naive school children who complain about learning Latin or Algebra because, "We will never use it once we grow up", we seem to have the same blinkered view of Bible knowledge. Generally speaking, Bible knowledge is not seen as being particularly relevant to the challenges that modern living throws up for the average person.

The reality is that it turns out that there are a number of unexpected situations in life where some knowledge of Latin or Algebra would be a real blessing, to say nothing of the benefit of developing our brains in our school years, by exercising them. One wonders how many people who decried learning specific subjects at school are now purchasing the latest gadget that claims to exercise the brain, or have sat around the table with the family and done a picture puzzle. Perhaps this latter pastime is seen as helping hone the skills necessary for putting together some flat pack furniture? Equally, marriages that began with such optimism and hope for the future and now are a battleground (along with brethren fighting) reveal that Bible knowledge is needed after all, for Christ came to bring peace (Eph. 2:14-18).

What might appear at the time to have little to no value can turn out to be incredibly useful further down the track; the problem is one of ignorance and lack of foresight. Of course, having convinced ourselves in the past that some activity was a waste of time, even in the face of evidence to the contrary which we chose to ignore, we can stubbornly stick with our beliefs and refuse to admit our foolishness.

But if we see no reason to study the scriptures, that in itself raises the question of why we view scripture as being of such little use in today's world. How is it that we have arrived at this situation? We have to look beyond the Church, for all the denominations are facing the very same problem; one would expect then that it must be something outside the Church. As the world in which we live can have a serious impact upon us (Romans 12:2), it deserves careful consideration to see how society might be influencing us. There may well be things about our society that have influenced religious people in general, and more importantly, those of us in the Lord's Church, to give Bible study such a low priority in life.

A CONSUMER SOCIETY

It is to state the obvious to say that we live in a consumer society. We all know it, and we are regularly reminded of it by the media. Other than the fact that we buy more things than we need and shops are geared to levering more of our money out of us than we can afford to spend, what does this mean in practical terms? When we give it some thought we can see that there are a number of unexpected ways in which just living in a consumer society can influence us against Bible study.

There is no doubt that science and technology have made life very comfortable for us. The improved efficiency in growing food, in manufacturing and in the distribution of goods has provided us with a remarkable array of cheap food and clothing. While we want more, and we complain about the high cost of living, the reality is that we are bountifully blessed with all we need to live comfortable lives. In the face of such plenty, the tendency is to take our eyes off God as provider. How long is it since you have heard included in a prayer, 'Give us this day our daily bread'?

As science and technology provide so generously our need for God appears less obvious and so we push him to the sidelines through neglect. As we see less and less need for God he become more and more remote and we begin to believe that he is not doing much at all in this world. As more and more we leave God out of the picture the desire to study his word diminishes, for we are doing rather well without him and without the hard work of having to study his word.

With society so bountifully providing all our needs, not only does our need for God appear to diminish, he gets in the way of our enjoying all the benefits on offer. We are constantly being told that buying the latest product will bring us satisfaction and fulfilment. Without a doubt some of the gizmos are quite dazzling and the advertising rather seductive, appealing and convincing. Why would we want to read the scriptures when they tell us that 'one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses' (Luke 12:15 NKJV)? In the midst of plenty, that is not what we want to hear. It is too pessimistic for us. When the received wisdom of our time is that one must always be positive, and someone being negative is the only thing that this society is prepared to be negative about, such teaching from scripture is hardly welcome.

Yet, we seem not to notice that with our acquisitiveness we are on a treadmill. Our houses and garages are full of products that promised the same fulfilment but failed to deliver what they promised. In reality, we are being held in a constant state of anticipated but unrealised contentment, and we seem to be comfortable that it is so.

Further, all that advertising designed to get us to part with our money is busy telling us that self-indulgence is good. Beyond the advertising is the relentless theme that consumers must keep spending to keep the economy growing. Self-denial would not be good for the economy; it would be un-British! But we know in our hearts that God is saying that Christianity is about very much about self-denial (Matthew 16:24). Why would we want to be reminded of that?

CONSUMERISM AND THE CHURCH

It used to be that shopping simply meant purchasing the necessities of life, but today we go to the store where the intention is that we have an experience, and so everything is there for our convenience. Express the fear that we might not like a particular item and we are assured that all we have to do is keep the receipt and return the product if we are not satisfied, and no questions will be asked. In other words, the consumer is king. We well understand that, for if we are unhappy with our local supermarket for whatever reason, there is sure to be another one within easy reach, and so we simply go to the supermarket that will give us what we want. Added to that, we know that loyalty is not rewarded but taken advantage of. What this does is build within each one of us the idea that the consumer is sovereign.

Surrounded by such thinking it is rather easy for people to take that mindset along with them when it comes to the Church. If the people in the Lord's Church are not friendly enough, attending a denominational church where people are friendly is the obvious answer. If brethren in the Church are not behaving as they should, then attending a church where people get on with each other is the way to deal with that. If worship is not enjoyable then finding a church where attendance is fun is the easy answer. If the Church expects the brethren to participate in Bible study and that it is too much like hard work, choosing to go somewhere else solves that problem. It is all too easy to slip into seeing ourselves as religious consumers who want their needs met and if they are not being met, to look elsewhere. It works for the groceries why not for the Church?

This influence can be seen at work in churches that are blessed in having a number of different teachers. Those teachers, whose classes are liked, attract a good number of people, but when a less popular teacher takes on the class, attendance drops off quite markedly. It is not Bible study per se that is attracting people but the teacher, and brethren are 'exercising their rights as consumers'.

It is perfectly understandable that some teachers will be better than others and it is true that some classes and sermons are of a pretty low standard, but poor Bible study is better than no Bible study. The answer is not for brethren to stop attending, for

invariably some who stop attending do not return even for good Bible studies. The answer is to teach the teachers how to teach properly in the first place. But if we tell someone that they need to improve their teaching they may choose to stop attending. Teachers can also act like consumers.

When we will serve God only on our terms, we have turned Christianity on its head. To use human terms, we are not the customers, for God is. The situation is not one of God pleasing us, but of us pleasing God (Matthew 7:23). We do not enter into the presence of God as consumers at all; in fact, the only reason that we can enter into his presence is because of his grace. Even then his wonderful grace does not change us into consumers. Rather, his grace teaches 'us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age' (Titus 2:12 NKJV). The only way that we can achieve that is through Bible study and sermons in the first place so that we might learn precisely what God requires of us.

That is some challenge when we have been educated into thinking that we are consumers and as such are sovereign.

NOT FROM CHRIST OR THE APOSTLES

That conviction that God exists in order to meet our needs rather than the one before whom we have no rights, we have learnt from somewhere other than the apostles. We have not learnt to see ourselves as consumers of inner experiences from Christ or from scripture; we have learnt it from our society. The idea that God exists to bless us rather than it being our responsibility to obey him, we have learnt from consumerism. That belief that God will shower us with prosperity and success and give us what we want, and if not we can go elsewhere, comes straight from the marketplace.

The marketplace may have convinced us that it is there for our benefit, our satisfaction, and in order to bless us; but that is a confidence trick. It is there to make money out of us. We are equally deceived, but with far more serious consequences, when we take the same thinking and apply it to God; when we see God as someone who is there to meet our perceived needs. That we see God in that light reveals that we are woefully lacking in Bible knowledge. While the market place has blessed us with such abundance, at the same time it has educated us into thinking that God is here for our pleasure and so we see little need for Bible study.

BIBLE STUDY WILL OPEN OUR EYES

It is through Bible study that we will have our eyes opened to the dangers of consumerism and come to realise that God is at work in this world and in our everyday lives. It is through Bible study that we will gain a greater faith in God and learn what our relationship with God ought to be. At the same time it will cause us to lose our faith in our modern world and its ability to provide what we need, and also to see the shallowness of it all. Through Bible study we will learn how we ought to live in this modern world, enjoying its blessings, while not being moulded by it, or even taken captive by it.

Accepted is the beloved (EPH: 1:6)

Andrew Sharp

Beloved, in preaching the good news of Salvation, i.e. the gospel, it is right we emphasize the great love wherewith God loved us (**EPH 2:4**).

Being human we can never be thankful enough, to our God and Saviour. The one, who left His Heavenly home, and took upon himself the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of man. The one who became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross (**PHIL: 2: 7-8**).

Now why should this be? Why was it necessary? We note that disobedience had brought sin into the world. It started at Adam and Eve. God's view of disobedience and sin is one of total abhorrence. How could He say, "I forgive" unless the debt has been paid first. It was Christ who paid the debt on that cross at Calvary. We need to remember that sin and all that goes with it, is abhorrent to God. In Ephesians 2, there is a reference to the children of disobedience, and children of wrath. Let's study and note!

An obedient Christian life pleases God. Loyal and faithful service is noted and blessed of Him, but displeasure can be caused by apathy, slipping or failing in our witness and service! Beloved, if we study the Scripture in those places where God is said to be angry, you may be surprised.

Men such as Moses, Aaron and Solomon, loyal men serving the Lord, were rebuked of God! They kindled his anger. Israel as a nation often provoked the Lord and incurred his anger. A few examples are noted where God is said to be angry.

MOSES " I am not eloquent — slow of speech —. and the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses (**EXOD 4: 10,14**).

MOSES Entry into the promised land: "also the Lord was angry with me for your sakes" (**DEUT. 1:37**).

AARON "And the Lord was very angry with Aaron to have destroyed him: and Prayed for Aaron also at the same time" (**DEUT. 9:20**).

MIRIAM & AARON "And the anger of the Lord was kindled against them" (**NUM. 12:9**).

SOLOMON "And the Lord was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned from the Lord God of Israel (**KINGS 11:9**).

Beloved, read **Ephesians 5: 3-6**. Here we are reminded of a list of evil practices that God hates, even as much as idolatry. **Ephesians 5: Verse 6** reads: "Let no man deceive you with vain words. For because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience."

The apostle Paul continued and wrote about the walk "as children of light", verse 10 being a welcome guide: "proving what is acceptable unto the Lord". The word "acceptable" I am told, is from the Greek word, *Euarestos*, and occurs seven times. Here is another passage containing this word: "And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God (**ROM. 12:2**).

Beloved, may it be, that we be given wisdom to walk in a way acceptable to the Lord. Let's be obedient to His will. If we take time to be holy, we will be loved and blessed of the Lord.

The Bystander Effect – it's not for Christians

(Colin Hilton, Hindley)

I was reading a report in a motoring magazine about helping people out when their vehicle had broken down and they were left stranded by the roadside.

The magazine had carried out a survey using 3 volunteer drivers. The first was a female researcher pretending to change a wheel. Within a minute she received offers of help. Even on a country road another motorist pulled up within 3 minutes to lend assistance. In a city street one man wanted to push her car before she even had time to release the handbrake!

A male researcher, who was shabbily dressed, had a miserable time, waiting as hundreds of motorists raced by with not one of the drivers willing to stop to help or ask what was wrong. Even his exaggerated pretence of changing a wheel failed to bring any offers of help.

The third person was a businessman, smartly dressed and pretending to be fixing a problem with the engine on a brand new Jaguar XJ Executive.

The three people were given 2 sets of clothing to dress in – one smart and the other unkempt.

As a common perception that a smart-looking businessman will get more offers of help than a woman wearing a donkey jacket and work boots. And so it proved in this experiment. The findings were put to a psychologist from the Royal Automobile Club (RAC) who said that they seemed to confirm a well-documented psychological occurrence known as the "bystander effect".

The term *bystander effect* refers to the phenomenon in which the greater the numbers of people present, the less likely people are to help a person in distress. When an emergency situation occurs, observers are more likely to take action if there are few or no other witnesses.

There are two major factors that contribute to the bystander effect. First, the presence of other people creates a **diffusion of responsibility**. Because there are

other observers, individuals do not feel as much pressure to take action, since the responsibility to take action is thought to be shared among all of those present. The second reason is the need to **behave in correct and socially acceptable ways**. When other observers fail to react, individuals often take this as a signal that a response is not needed or not appropriate.

In the experiment above the main factors which determine whether people will stop are thought to be firstly, whether their feelings will be disturbed by stopping and, secondly, whether or not they are putting themselves at risk.

So what about us as Christians? Are we on the outside looking in at the needs of the lost souls around us? Do we suffer from a tendency towards the "bystander effect"?

I really love the story commonly referred to as the parable of The Good Samaritan. It contains some points of real conscience. We should all be concerned to know what good we should do in this life as a means to our own attainment of eternal life. The lawyer put such a question to Jesus when, as Luke records: He stood up and asked of Jesus: "Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

The lesson of this parable is crystal clear and it is this: when the day comes on which we stand before the Lord, our great High Priest, he is going to judge us on the way that we reacted to the needs of our fellow men; not just 'the high and the mighty' but also the humble and poor; not just the smartly dressed but the ones that are clothed in rags too. He will not judge us on the basis of how much knowledge we have collected or how much fame we have gained or how much of a bank balance that we have accumulated. Rather, he is going to judge us, at least in part, on the help that we have given to those in need.

The story of Francis of Assisi begins by relating that he was a rich young man and a lover of pleasure – one of the famous youths of his day. His father was a wealthy cloth merchant. One day he was riding his horse to a neighbouring town when he came across a poor, hideously disfigured man. Now up to this moment Francis, although showing some magnanimity of spirit towards the poor, had really revelled in pleasures and riches. But the story goes on that on this day he dismounted from his horse and threw his arms around this wreck of a man and gave him all the money that he had. Some accounts say that as Francis embraced the man it was if the figure lying there in his arms seemed to change into Jesus himself.

Matthew 25: 40: "...and the King shall answer and say unto them, truly I say unto you, inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, you have done it to me." In this sense, if help is given to a fellow human, it is help given to Christ himself.

The sword of grief and pity should pierce our hearts whenever we see the sight of human need and unhappiness. It isn't enough though to see or feel. Both of these senses should be turned into action. We who have been reconciled to God by accepting Christ into our lives have been called to high service. 12 Cor. 5:18: "... and all things are of God, who has reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and has given to us the ministry of reconciliation".

If we believe in God, it is our duty to dedicate our lives to the cause of His kingdom in the world. "For we are labourers together with God" (1 Cor. 3:9). This is the

greatest honour that we can have in our life of service. We are God's tool-kit; God's husbandry; God's building; God's cultivation of the soil. We are not the agent - rather we are the instrument; not the workman, but the tool. As Paul says, it isn't 'Christ and I', but "Christ through me" according to the power that works in us. And we should be ready with the answer to the call of service: "then I heard the voice of the Lord saying - whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then I answered and said, Here I am, send me" (Isaiah 6:8).

It is commonly accepted that people will gladly give away anything but themselves. It isn't enough just to give time, money or a little energy. These won't be accounted to us as a sufficient substitute by Him who gave not only His possession, but also His very life for us.

The desire of a Christian is to take in, not to shut out. It's a grievous and tragic thing to see how many Christians these days are concerned to shut the door rather than to open it; they are concerned to narrow the circle rather than to widen it. Their policy is withdrawal from others rather than co-operation with them. To anyone who hasn't accepted the Lord into his or her life I urge you to send out a call today for Jesus to give you a new start in life. And for those who already belong to the Lord, let's not be stood on the outside looking in, but let's be on the inside looking out and helping those who need our assistance in coming to know Jesus. Not waiting, but working. Not a bystander but a willing helper.

GOD'S LOVE FOR YOU

By V.Sujatha (Stretford)

He has been watching you from the day He made you. He made you from the dust of earth and made you rule over all things (Ecclesiasts 3:20, Genesis 2:7). You were made in His image (James 3:9). Then He saw you take your first step towards sin (Isaiah 59:2). He watched you go away from Him. He saw you go close to hell and wanted to save you because you are His creation, His children (Acts 17:28,29).

His love for you was so great that He sent His only begotten Son to die for you so that you may be saved through His Son, Jesus (Luke 19:10, John 3:16,17). Jesus was sinless (1 Peter 2:22; Hebrews 4:15), still He saw Him suffer for you. He suffered great distress and agony. He was forsaken by His friends (Matthew 26:56); He was despised and rejected (Matthew 27:39,40); He was betrayed and denied (Matthew 3:48-75). His Son, the Son of God came for you and He saw you mock and persecute Him (Mark 15:16-20). Even though He was in the form of God, He took on the form of a slave (Philippians 2:5-7). He watched you crucify His son (Matthew 27:31). He watched His Son die for you (Mark 15:37). He gave you a perfect plan to save you from sin (Acts 2) but you did not listen. He sent many prophets with the good news but you did not listen. He sent his Son from heaven but you did not believe. Still the Father waits for you in Heaven, waiting for His lost children to come to Him. The last thing He would want is for you to go to the place of torment. There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over people, who do not need to repent (Luke 15:7). When your earthly father forgives you your sins and accepts you back into the house he rejoices that his lost child is back (Luke 15:11-24). How much more happy your heavenly Father will be to have His lost child back. He is waiting in heaven with open arms for you. Come to Him; come to your Father.

News and Information

Ghana Appeal

The Ghana fund committee would like to announce the retirement of the fund secretary Janet Macdonald, she was a valued member of the committee and her hard work and dedication were a testimony to her love for the Ghanaian brethren and the Lord. We are pleased that sister Christine Wood ctkwood@hotmail.com has volunteered to take her place and would ask that all donation cheques for the work in Ghana be made payable to: Dennyloanhead Church of Christ Ghana Fund and sent to Mrs. Christine Wood, 11 Albert Place, Stirling, FK8 2RE.

We would ask for your continued prayers for the work of the Lord in Ghana and pray above all that the Lord be glorified and that the seed planted in Ghana will grow into the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as

the chief cornerstone and that in him the whole building will be joined together and rise to become a holy temple in the Lord. (cf. Ephesians 2:20). Thank you for your continued support.

Dale Meikle

Coming Events

EUROPEAN CHRISTIAN WORKSHOP 2010

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

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