

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 **Restore for me the joy of thy salvation**

Our Christian experience is full of circumstances that create strongly contrasting emotions. To give one simple example, those brothers who 'lead' congregations through the communion generally offer a few words of introduction to the 'breaking of bread' and from my own experience it is difficult to pitch those thoughts accurately because within the congregation there may, at one and the same time, be those who are approaching the

communion with great joy in their hearts because of their overwhelming sense of gratitude towards Jesus for bringing about their salvation, whilst another is reflecting upon, and is perhaps deeply saddened by, thoughts about the savage price that Jesus (and the Father) had to pay for our redemption. Joy and sadness co-existing. We exult and rejoice in the triumph of the resurrection and Jesus' conquering of death, but shudder at the thought of the physical and spiritual atrocities meted out to our Saviour and the fact the He had to become our vicarious sin-bearer.

A suffering Father

I'd like to make a point here that has been on my mind for some time. Whilst we often refer to the suffering of Jesus in terms of our salvation, and rightly so, I can't imagine the Father as a benign and dispassionate onlooker to the events that unfolded at Calvary and it's my personal belief that the Father must also have suffered terribly as His Son went to the Cross. There is of course a school of thought that rationalises that as Jesus had 'become' sin, and because God hates sin, God forsook Jesus on the cross – metaphorically turned his back on His Christ and left him to face death alone. I find it impossible to believe that only a few days after Jesus had talked to his disciples about the unity of the Godhead, and at the very point that Jesus fulfilled the work of the Father in complete

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obedience to Him and performed the act that was to be the means of restoring God's creation to Himself, that the Father 'forsook' His Son. Rather, in my mind's eye, I see a broken-hearted and grieving Father who shared and empathised with the suffering of His Son.

Guilt and Grace

Listening to Christians talk over the years, I think that one of the elements of our new relationship with Jesus and the Father that we have the greatest difficulty in accepting is our freedom from sin and the guiltlessness that flows from the freedom. And in some respects this is quite understandable because culturally we are used to having to earn the 'good things' that come our way. Even at a very mundane level many of us are likely to be embarrassed or very self-effacing if we are fortunate enough to be the object of unsolicited praise or compliments by our family, friends, work colleagues or fellow Christians. If we are the recipient of an unexpected gift, we may feel the urge to 'settle the account' by buying something 'in return' for the one who gave us the gift, even though that may have been the last thing on the mind of our benefactor. The majority of people, and possibly even more so people with Christian principles, have a strong work ethic and work on the basis that in life 'we get what we deserve'. So the idea of grace – unmerited favour – or the 'free gift of God' is something that is quite foreign to us and therefore hard to grasp. And yet the whole point of grace is that our salvation **is** unearned, undeserved, unmerited – nothing at all to do with **our** qualities but everything to do with the inherent divine qualities of God expressed and fulfilled in Jesus. "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus ..." wrote Paul to the Roman church. In Jesus we are made free and no longer live under 'the law of sin and death', but by grace live under 'the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus'. And it is that 'spirit of life', essentially the life of God that is without beginning or end that gives Christians the blessed hope of eternal life. The apostle also wrote to the church in Corinth, and, speaking of Jesus the Christ, had these words of encouragement for the Christian community there: "... who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor: 1:8).

Let praise, joy and thanksgiving abound

We need to come to terms with the fact that our guilt has been dealt with. Sometimes I am a little bit envious of some of our more 'charismatic' and 'evangelical' counterparts, especially in the sense that, overtly at least, there seems to be an unbridled joy in their worship – and I'm not referring to music-induced 'frenzy' here, just a much more obvious emphasis on 'praise', 'worship' and 'salvation' rather than the 'nitty-gritty' of doctrine – a freer expression of the joy of salvation than is sometimes evident in our services (I speak of my own experience which may not be shared by all readers). We in 'churches of Christ' have tended to major on doctrinal purity as part of our 'restoration' appeal; we place a considerable amount of emphasis, quite properly, on the communion (breaking of bread) and that naturally leads to a deep reflection on the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus and we are confronted by the haunting reality of Jesus' suffering, humiliation and death. And perhaps those conflicting emotions that I referred to earlier come to the fore most tellingly here. In view of the sacrificial, selfless, suffering of Jesus, our Saviour who was mocked, ridiculed and spat upon, with the tortuous crown of thorns plaited and

beaten onto his head and cruelly and unjustifiably crucified with common criminals – in view of that terrible cost, just how can we deserve the free gift of grace? And the reality is of course that we can never, ever deserve or earn the right to salvation. That is why, in God's great plan for the fullness of time, our salvation had to be based on the free gift. Paul told the Ephesians that our redemption and forgiveness is "according to the riches of his grace which he lavished upon us". In God there is grace in abundance that is wonderfully free, and the hurdle that we have to mentally overcome is that we must not allow the fact we don't merit the free gift to be an obstacle to our joy in our acceptance of the free gift. Indeed it is our release from the bondage of sin that, despite the cost, is the source of our joy and we should feel free to express that joy in praise and thankfulness.

God is merciful

God's relationship with the nation of Israel was, at times, a very fraught one. That nation was fractious, rebellious and disobedient toward God to the extent that He turned away from it in anger and threatened it with a 'bill of divorcement'. The nation of Israel was a people guilty of sin before and toward God. Yet at the same time He pleaded for the people to repent and promised them restoration and salvation if that repentance were forthcoming. The nation of Israel played the harlot, yet the Lord still sought 'faithless Israel' to acknowledge her guilt and return. "I will not look on you in anger, for I am merciful, says the Lord; I will not be angry for ever" (Jeremiah 3:12 ff). So Isaiah was able to speak of the Lord's anger turning away and prophesying of the nation of Israel: "With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation" (Isaiah 12:3). On the restoration of Israel he was able to speak of 'sorrow and sighing fleeing away', so that "The ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness ..." (Is. 35:10); on their confession of sin, they would be acknowledged as "a people whom the Lord has blessed" (Is. 61:9). Perhaps no one epitomises better than David the need to confront wrongdoing and overcome the feelings of guilt and unworthiness that flow from that wrongdoing, but even he had sufficient trust in the mercy and forgiveness of God to seek His help in the creation of a clean heart, the restoration to him of the "joy of thy salvation" and deliverance from 'bloodguiltiness'. Truly our God is a God of far-reaching mercy, compassion and forgiveness to those who acknowledge wrongdoing and repent.

I implied earlier that sheer, joyful expressions of praise, thankfulness and gratitude towards toward God may have, over the years, taken second place to a relentless pursuit of doctrinal purity or even been affected by a residual sense of our guilt at what Jesus had to suffer to achieve our salvation. I suspect that some readers will feel that a focus on hardcore, doctrinal issues is still to be regarded as 'real Christianity', whilst a focus on joy, peace, love and thankfulness is somehow superficial and skirts over the tough, real issues. If that is the case, then please look again at Paul's description of the 'fruits of the Spirit' in the Galatian letter or the characteristics of what is often described as 'the transformed work' in the Colossian letter and I would defy any Christian to realistically claim that they had cracked all of those characteristics. These are not whimsical characteristics that the Christian can choose to overlook, but rather they are the essence of the very nature of God that we should be trying to emulate in our lives. They are at the heart of the new creation that we have become. Paul bowed to no-one in his desire to properly represent the Lord in his ministry but when the passions of the Roman church became distorted

towards the wrong issues he reminded them of the true worth of Jesus' sacrifice: "For the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit; he who thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. Let us then pursue what makes for peace and mutual upbuilding. Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God" (Romans 14:17-20).

Jesus dealt with our guilt

If our joy in Christ is to find its fullest expression we must become comfortable with the fact if we have 'put on' Christ, then He has acquitted us, rendered us not guilty, and it is in this fact that our joy is made complete. Paul said to the Ephesians that, "we who first hoped in Christ have been destined and appointed to live for the praise of his glory". When the gift of grace was lavished upon us we didn't just receive something – rather we **became** something. We became children of God, people born of God, part of his family, enjoined in the glorious unity of Father, Son and Spirit. And we have only become the recipients of such overwhelming blessing because Christ has made us free, righteous and guiltless.

For me the renowned hymn-writer Isaac Watts captured this sentiment correctly in his hymn "Not all the blood of beasts.." Reflecting upon the inadequacy of other sacrifices he writes in the second verse of that hymn:

"But Christ, the heavenly Lamb,
Takes all our guilt away,
A sacrifice of nobler name,
And richer blood than they."

And again in the fourth verse:

My soul looks back to see
The burdens Thou didst bear,
While hanging on the cursed tree,
And knows my guilt was there."

It is the sentiment firstly, that Christ takes all our guilt away, and, secondly that our guilt was dealt with on the cross that is important here. We are meant to live our lives in a manner that is redolent of the joy and thankfulness that we feel for our salvation and that is reflective of the grace and love that has been extended to us by a loving God and his Christ. We must always have in our minds the terrible price of our redemption, but we must also give full value to that redemption by unburdening ourselves from the weight of sin and guilt. Christ dealt with our sin; Christ dealt with our guilt. Whatever we do in our lives we cannot turn back history. We can't rewrite history or do anything that can prevent Jesus from going to the cross. By continuing to carry our own guilt we are attempting to do the impossible. If we are to truly experience the joy of our salvation then we have to learn to leave our guilt behind. For the person with a conscience, guilt gnaws at the mind; it is a constant companion at the feast, a haunting reminder of inadequacy and insufficiency. But that isn't what God wants. "Without having seen him you love him; though you do not now see him you believe in him and rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy. As the outcome of your faith you obtain the salvation of your souls" (1 Peter 8,9).



QUESTION:
Should, or may, a church building be
used as a venue for a Marriage
Ceremony?



Having served a lifetime - (well! *almost!*) - in the Church, as preacher, teacher and writer, I might be excused for thinking that I have encountered just about every faith-related topic that could possibly be raised. But I would be mistaken, and, in this issue of the 'S.S', I wish to look at a subject, raised by a brother in the U.S.A., about which I have never previously heard.

This brother says that he was brought up to believe that 'Wedding services should not be held in church-buildings', and the question which his statement raises is, 'Should (or may), a church-building be used as a venue for a marriage ceremony?'

I feel that I must also admit that I am not at all sure what lies behind this question, because although I have had contact with congregations of the Lord's people in some 20 different countries, and met brethren who hold widely varying views on a host of subjects, I have never heard of any group that takes the position expressed by the questioner.

Opposed to 'Church Weddings'

There are, of course, groups in society who reject what, for the sake of convenience, I shall call 'Church weddings'.

- There is the 'Atheist', who scorns a 'church-wedding', because he sees no point in seeking the blessing of a God whose very existence he denies, and who would probably regard himself as a hypocrite if he had any part in such a ceremony.
- There is also 'Agnostic', who tells us that he does not know whether God exists or not, and for whom, therefore, there is little point in having a wedding 'in Church'. People who hold these opinions normally opt for a ceremony at the local Registry Office, which, I might add, in many countries is the ceremony that is required and recognized by law. In such countries, after the visit to the Registry Office, a religious ceremony is optional.
- And then there is that apparently growing number of people who regard marriage as 'old-fashioned' and 'out-dated'; who claim that weddings are 'usually just for show, and an unnecessary expense', and who choose to live together without marking their relationship in any formal way.

Now, these are the views of people who have no religious faith, and they do not surprise us. But it does come as something of a surprise to learn that there are Christians who see something amiss with a wedding service in a church-building, and the only explanation I can suggest is that they hold greatly mistaken views about the significance of the 'Church-building' and the purpose the building is designed to serve. What is more, they have not really understood what the scriptures teach concerning the Church itself.

"No place for a Kitchen!"

As I think about our American brother's question I recall that in 1968, when we were planning to erect the meeting-place currently used by the church in Corby, Isobel, my wife, and I gave hospitality to a visiting couple who were members of a small church in the United States.

On hearing that we were planning to build, the wife asked if she might see the plans - a request which I found rather unusual, since she did not seem to me to be the kind of person who would be interested in such matters. The reason for her interest soon became apparent, because the first thing she noticed was that there was to be a kitchen in the building, and she promptly informed us that, in their church, they had 'studied this', and had come to the conclusion that a kitchen in a church-building is 'unscriptural'.

I will not inflict on you the entire story of the ensuing debate. Sufficient to say that this sister apparently thought that, since the church in Corby had been newly established, we also must be

new converts, and she asked how long we had been members of the Church - and was clearly surprised when we told her. Isobel and I had both been Christians longer than she had been alive!

By what Authority?

She then bluntly asked us to show 'scriptural authority' for the kitchen in the building, and I, with equal bluntness, said that the authority for the kitchen could be found in the verse immediately following the one that authorizes toilet facilities, and this proved to be something she had not considered. I might also have asked her what scriptural authority exists for the church building itself, but we did not get that far. The discussion ended rather abruptly!

A year or two later, during the days of the 'Corby Holiday Fellowship', a visiting American evangelist, who was serving a congregation in this country, declined to accept the invitation to share the mid-day meal provided by the Corby sisters, to be served in the classroom section of the building. He chose to find a place in Corby town centre, where he ate, along with the two or three brethren he had brought with him. It was obvious that he shared the view of the sister about whom I have just written. He believed that it is wrong to eat in the church building - although, I might add, it did not prevent him from accepting a cup of coffee that had been prepared in the evil kitchen!

As Proverbs 26:7 tells us, "**The legs of the lame are not equal**".

The Crucial Question

The question that needs to be asked is why do these brethren hold such views? I suggest that it may be because they have come to believe that the church building is 'holy' in much the same way that the Temple built by Solomon was holy. And that is a grave mistake.

A Dwelling Place for God

After the conclusion of the Covenant, at Sinai, in obedience to God's command and according to his explicit specification, the Israelites built a Tabernacle, a portable structure, which was to be the focal point in their new religious system.

That Tabernacle, and especially the room known as 'The Holy of Holies', testified to God's constant Presence with His people, Israel, and it was in that four-square room that the High Priest 'met' God and came closest to God, when, on the Day of Atonement, he interceded with God on behalf of all Israel - priesthood and people alike. The Tabernacle was 'holy', as no other place on Earth was holy, because God chose to be represented there.

Later a Temple, which though not expressly required by God, was built under His permissive will by Solomon. God condescended to 'dwell' in it, so that the Old Testament scriptures repeatedly describe the Temple as '*The House of God*'.

You will recall that Jesus Himself spoke of 'My Father's House', and quoted God as saying, "**My House shall be a house of prayer for all nations.**" (Mark 11:17). To those who were degrading the Temple, Jesus said, "**Make not My Father's House a house of merchandise**" (John 2:16), and, in the next verse He prayed, "**The zeal of Thy House hath eaten me up**".

Eventually, when it had become obvious that the people rejected their Messiah, He said, "**Your House is left to you desolate**" (Matt.23:38). God no longer dwelt among them, and had even abandoned the Temple. It was no longer '*The House of God*'.

We know what became of the Temple. During the Roman siege of Jerusalem, it was destroyed - burnt down by a flaming torch thrown into it by a Roman soldier, in disobedience of the command of Titus, the Roman General, the son of the Emperor Vespasian, who had ordered that the Temple should not be damaged. It was never rebuilt, although several attempts were made to disprove the Lord's prediction.

But God is not without a Temple, for a new Temple has been created, though it is not any of the magnificent buildings that, in past centuries, have been erected ostensibly '*to the glory of God*'. Solomon realized something that his father David does not seem to have understood. At the dedication of the first Temple, Solomon said, "**And shall God in very deed dwell with men on the earth? Behold, heaven, and the heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee, how much**

less this house which I have built?"

But the early Christians seem to have understood this, because they erected no Temple, nor did they erect, or use, specially prepared buildings in which to offer their worship. Instead, we read about them gathering in houses, the homes of members of the Church:

- Acts 12:12, tells us that they met for prayer in the house of the mother of John Mark.
- In Rom.16:5, Paul mentions the church in the house of Aquilla and Priscilla.
- In fact, it is almost certain that the early Christians never owned a church building, nor would they have wished to, since it would certainly have attracted persecution and violence.

Constantine's Decree.

No doubt influenced by his mother Helene who was a Christian, the Emperor Constantine issued a series of decrees, of increasing severity, against the traditional pagan religion of the Roman world. After 324 A.D., he banned pagan worship and ordered that pagan Temples and their contents should be handed over to the Christians, and thus the Church came into the possession of buildings designed for worship, and was able to use them without fear of persecution.

The Roman Church 'converted' the images and pictures which pagan Romans had worshipped, turning them into Christian 'saints', whilst pagan holy days became 'Christian' holy days. Christendom obtained its 'church buildings', but we have to say that in making Christianity the official religion of the Roman World, Constantine probably did the Church the greatest disservice that any individual has ever done.

The Real Temple

I said that God is not without His Temple, and this is the reality. To the Corinthian Church, Paul wrote,

- **"Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any man defiles the temple of God, him will God destroy, for the temple of God is holy, which temple you are"** (1st.Cor 5:16-17).
- Addressing the individual Corinthian believer, in 1stCor.6:19, Paul wrote, **"Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, which you have received from God, and you are not your own"**.
- Now add to these statements the word of Jesus in John 14:23: **"If a man loves me he will keep my words, my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and we will make our abode with him."**

Do you see that the Church, as a body, and every individual, obedient believer, has the indwelling Presence of the entire Godhead - Father, Son and Holy Spirit? Hence, in 1st Peter 2:5, we are told that, **"You are living stones, built up a spiritual house, to offer up spiritual sacrifices to God by Jesus Christ."**

Conclusion

Our church-buildings are nothing more than tools - expedients - useful aids, like hymn-books, which help us to obey God's command instructing us to come together to worship Him, and the presence of a kitchen or any other reasonable facility in the building cannot possibly make it 'unholy', because the building itself not holy. The only time it *becomes* a 'holy' place is when the true Temple of God, the Body of Christ meets in it for worship.

As for the question concerning marriages in the church building, it seems to me that, since marriage was instituted by God Himself, the most appropriate place in which Christians should seek His blessing on their marriages is surely the place in which they are accustomed to worship Him.

Sadly, there are misguided souls that are more concerned about the imagined sanctity of their church buildings, than they are about maintaining the holiness of the true Temple, without which "no man shall see the Lord".

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Thinking Out Loud

OUTSTANDING BRAVERY

Ian S. Davidson: Motherwell

I recently read a book on the history of the Victoria Cross. The Victoria Cross was established in 1856 during the Crimean War and "has remained to this day the highest British reward 'for valour' and is perhaps the most prestigious gallantry medal in the world" (Peter Duckers). Since 1856, well over 1300 VC's have been awarded for bravery in battles fought in the Crimea to Iraq. For example, 182 medals for actions during World War 2; 182 for actions during the Indian Mutiny, 1857-9; and 628 for heroic deeds in the First World War, 1914-18. I once did a special study of the First World War, which led me to the battlefields of Northern France. I shall never forget the rows and rows of gravestones in the huge cemeteries there. The whole experience in France and southern Belgium has had a profound influence on me. No one can leave the World War 1 battle sites unaffected.

Interestingly, four pairs of brothers and three father-and-son pairs have won the Victoria Cross. Incredibly, three men have received a bar to their Victoria Cross (that is, two Victoria Crosses). The latest recipient was a New Zealander, Captain Charles Upham, who fought in the Second World War. Interestingly, 16 Crosses were awarded for actions in the Second Afghan War, 1878-80 and one for heroism in the Iraq Revolt, 1919-20. These are wars long forgotten by many, but from which we should learn lessons today. Do we ever learn?

BRAVERY IN THE BIBLE

We read of many brave people in the Bible. Whom would you regard as brave, dear reader? Let me throw some names your way: Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Gideon, David, Daniel, Esther, John the Baptist, James, John, Stephen and Paul. I leave you to add your favourites because I think there are many more brave souls worthy of our admiration. Those martyred were especially brave: Abel, Zechariah, John the Baptist, Stephen and James.

I think Jesus Himself showed tremendous courage in all that He did. He had many enemies, who were always scheming against Him to destroy Him, but He bravely carried on, no matter what. He saw it through despite the attacks by Satan. The foreknowledge of His terrible suffering and death never weakened His resolve. In fact we read on one occasion: "...He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem" (Luke 9: 51b). Jesus was the bravest of the brave. But for His bravery the reward was not the Victoria Cross, but the cruel cross of Calvary.

THE APOSTLE PAUL

The apostle Paul was an exceptional human being. I never tire of reading about him. He once wrote: "...in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by my own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils amongst false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which comes upon me daily, the care of all the churches" (2 Corinthians 11: 23b - 28). He puts most disciples to shame for their timidity and feebleness.

THE EARLY SAINTS

The early saints suffered much, but were tremendously brave in the face of deadly persecution. I have always been interested in Roman history. I like to read, for example, the writings of Publius Cornelius Tacitus (AD c.55-c.117). In his book *The Annals of Imperial Rome* he tells about the dreadful goings-on against the Christians in the days of the Emperor Nero. In his chapter *The Burning of Rome* we read: "...Nero fabricated scapegoats – and punished with every refinement the notoriously depraved Christians (as they were popularly called). Their originator, Christ, had been executed in Tiberius' reign by the governor of Judea, Pontius Pilatus. First, Nero had self-acknowledged Christians arrested. Then, on their information, large numbers of others were condemned – not so much for incendiaryism as for their anti-social tendencies. Their deaths were made farcical. Dressed in wild animals' skins, they were torn to pieces by dogs, or crucified, or made into torches to be ignited after dark as substitutes for daylight. Nero provided his Gardens for the spectacle, and exhibited displays in the Circus, at which he mingled with the crowd – or stood in a chariot, dressed as a charioteer. Despite their guilt as Christians, and the ruthless punishment it deserved, the victims were pitied. For it was felt that they were being sacrificed to one man's brutality rather than to the national interest." The God whom I love and serve allowed all such things to happen. I am left to wonder why.

VALOUR

The Victoria Cross has to do with valour. The Dictionary defines valour as "the quality of mind which enables a person to face danger with boldness and firmness; courage or bravery, esp. as shown in warfare or conflict." I see from my Young's Analytical Concordance to the Bible that the Hebrew word *chayil* is translated thirty-seven times as "valour" in the Authorised Version. It is used, for example, of Gideon (Judges 6: 12); Jephthah (Judges 11:1); Naaman (2 Kings 5:1); Zadok (1 Chronicles 12: 28); and Eliada (2 Chronicles 17: 17). Dear brothers and sisters in the Lord, we should be people of valour. We are in a war, the war of the ages, the greatest war the world has seen. It is good versus evil, light versus darkness, God versus Satan. In truth, when we committed ourselves to Jesus, we became His soldiers. Therefore, we have to "fight the good fight of faith" (1 Timothy 6: 12) and "war a good warfare" (1 Timothy 1: 18). The great thing about this conflict is that we know the final outcome. We are assured of victory. Jesus, for example, is seen in the book of Revelation riding a white horse (19: 11), a symbol of victory. (Robert Wallace Orr entitles his commentary on Revelation: *Victory Pangeant*. I think he was spot-on there.) Knowledge of all this brings new meaning to the hymn: *Onward, Christian Soldiers!*

A CROWN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

Paul wrote: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also who love His appearing" (2 Timothy 4: 7-8). True valour results in our receiving "a crown of righteousness", and true valour has to do with fighting the good fight, finishing the course and keeping the faith. All this takes effort, a mighty effort. But we are not alone in the warfare. We have the support of our fellow soldiers and their prayers, the holy angels, the Father, Jesus our King and the Holy Spirit. Alexander Campbell has written: "Rise up, then, in the strength of Judah's Lion! Be valiant for the truth! Adorn yourselves with all the graces of the Spirit of God! Put on the armour of light; and, with all the gentleness, and meekness, and mildness there is in Christ – with all the courage, and patience, and zeal, and effort, worthy of a cause so salutary, so pure, so holy, and so Divine, determine never to faint nor to falter till you enter the pearly gates – never to lay down your arms till, with the triumphant millions, you stand before the throne, and exultingly sing, 'Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and might, and honour, and glory, and blessing!' 'To Him who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing, and honour, and glory, and strength, forever and forever!' Amen."

INFLUENCES ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHRISTIANITY IN THE FIRST CENTURY

(John H Diggle (Nottingham))

STUDY 13 – Early Heresies 2

As well as Gnosticism, a whole plethora of controversies was thrown up by a variety of motivations that were held by those who wished to promote their personal interpretations of available scripture as authoritative. In some cases these amounted to over-confidence in personal intuition, speculation and interpretational insight that stretched inspired scripture beyond what it was able to bear; in others scant regard was paid to the message that God wanted to be heard, in favour of a thesis that was little more than personal preference, coated with a thin veneer of pretended scriptural authority, for the sake of its being lent an apparent authoritative weight to which it was not entitled. Men, methods and means have not really changed very much in two millennia.

It is nevertheless remarkable to note that in almost every case these early departures have retained ramifications that have continued to surface and resurface over the course of subsequent centuries, including some that are still argued over to this day, and some that have even been taken as current expressions of orthodoxy. The length of time for which some have believed a thing is, at best, an unreliable guide to its truth.

The whole concept of conservatism and orthodoxy is one that we need to be a little more careful with than we sometimes show evidence of being. Both terms have a tendency to be used as labels to be stuck onto others with whom we do not see eye to eye, and to be traded, along with their opposite concept, liberalism, as badges of conformity, or otherwise, with our own opinions. That is not to say that there is no such thing as true orthodoxy or liberalism; it is simply that we can be a bit too hasty in dishing out the labels on the basis of criteria that don't always bear the closest of scrutiny.

I make that point because it is very easy to assume a degree of liberal intent amongst our early brethren, which is rather harsh and unfair to them. In matters related to salvation it is my view that God went to tremendous lengths to ensure that these were intelligible with crystal and universal clarity, but in the case of what we might consider orthodox views of, for example, the person and work of the Holy Spirit, the trinity of the Godhead, some aspects of Church government, what constituted worship that is "in spirit and truth" and many others like these, I am not entirely sure that a rigid sense of orthodoxy arrived on the scene very quickly at all. We know, or like to think that we do, where true, conservative and apostolic orthodoxy lies in each of these areas, and are able to substantiate our views (hopefully) by reference to scripture, but many, if not the majority of our early brethren, had no such opportunity, and that was the way that it remained for centuries.

Clearly thought out presentations of doctrine, and even the inclination to search out the principles on which such formulations lay in scriptural authority, were more often than not the result of blatant challenges from those of spiritual ill will. To that extent, this was thinking that needed to be done under extreme pressure, and both quickly and emphatically pointed to the great dangers of an "issue-based" formulation of doctrine. The problem with such emotionally charged situations is that they always generate more heat than light. Paul steadfastly refused to get involved in the debating of issues instead of persistently teaching plain truth, and that was also, you may recall, the approach of the first post-apostolic leaders of the Church. The New

Testament nowhere presents us with anything like a systematic theology with each area of doctrine neatly outlined in logical order, because on most matters the apostles never even attempted any such thing. Paul comes close on the question of justification by grace through faith, which is of course a salvation issue, but for the rest it is mostly a case of putting it together for ourselves from what is admittedly a comprehensive stock of constituent parts. Credal formulae are not something with which the New Testament is heavily laden.

With the single but vital exception of salvation-related matters it rather seems open to doubt whether the majority of early Christians would have had much an answer to the question, "what is the Church's teaching on x, y or z?" More often than not, did it really have a 'party line' or 'official teaching' or 'the conservative orthodoxy'? Please, please notice that this is an entirely different proposition from their being unable to "give a reason for the hope that lay within them". If you have doubts about this, and remember that we have the advantage of a New Testament that for the most part they did not, try the experiment of sitting down to write **the** definitive statement of apostolic authority on the person and work of the Holy Spirit or the correct manner of the appointment of elders or the perfectly acceptable act of worship (to God that is). That statement must be absolutely scripturally watertight mind you and able to refute all reasonable arguments offered against it by faithful and spiritually minded brethren, without exception. And notice please that none of these topics that I have proposed are in connection with what could reasonably be called trivial or unimportant matters. I am not saying this in advocacy of a lapse or lurch into sloppy thinking, licence, liberalism or 'do as you please religion', but in a plea for more sympathetic understanding of those who were our early brethren and who deserve our fairness.

When it came to the need for a defence of the truth against the attacks of those who were downright hostile to it, and whether they manifested that hostility within the Church or without, deceitfully or brazenly, those capable of doing so had to marshal arguments, scriptural fact and a high degree of Spirit led logic in that defence of truth.

On the evidence of Ephesians 4:11ff, I firmly believe that God has seen to it, in every generation, that His Church is provided with such men, and 2 Timothy 2:2 implies something of a similar intent. But even at that, we know only too well that the most intense and widespread respect for any man's conservatism and doctrinal orthodoxy is neither proof of correctness, nor guarantee of immunity to vigorous challenge. Whether it is always convenient for us to recognise it or not, it has often been the case in practice that we have relied on responses to previous challenges of the same or similar type, instead of thinking it through again, as we ought to, from scriptural basics, and this is where there are dangers to be aware of in proceeding on the basis of received orthodoxy.

It is always and must always be the apostolic foundations of truth, on which even good arguments are offered, to which we must turn for our reasoning. I almost made the mistake of writing "for substantiation of our beliefs", but that would reflect a very bad habit of interpretational method were it to be applied in that order.

Montanus was one of the Church's first 'charismatics' inviting his brethren to respond to formalism and woodenness of worship with greater 'spiritual' exuberance fed by asceticism, celibacy and rigorous moral discipline. He also proclaimed the imminent arrival of a millennial, earthly kingdom of Christ.

The **Monarchianists** denied the equality of Son and Spirit with the Father. **Novation** preached the impossibility of restoration for those who had once denied Christ and **Mani**, (whence **Manichianism**), was ambassador for an extreme form of Gnosticism, which maximised the elements of eastern mysticism and all but denied the legitimacy of Christianity. This was a form of teaching with which Augustine flirted briefly, as well as exhibiting a tendency to dabble with a number of dubious philosophies, before

settling down to something more like the apparent orthodoxy for which he is generally known.

To be honest I don't have any great enthusiasm for simply cataloguing the huge variety of controversies and heresies that beset the Church, and have only mentioned this very brief sample for the sake of illustrating that they ranged over a number of different areas and held varying degrees of real relevance to the fundamentals of the faith. It should be added that whilst such was not always the case, individuals could and did change their teaching and thinking, even in matters with which their name has come to be associated. Having once held a view does not amount to its permanent tattooing on one's forehead, and repentance from error is surely to be preferred and encouraged over holding those who once espoused it under permanent suspicion and probation.

Without for a moment encouraging sloppy free thinking it is noticeable from this glimpse of early Church history, that doctrinal orthodoxy was a thing in flux; it took time and considerable effort to develop into anything like the form that we know, or believe that we do. God's last word has been spoken, but that is not the same thing as saying that God's last word has been perfectly comprehended, recognised and practised. Even if we have legitimate ambitions of restoring New Testament Christianity, and I'm not entirely sure that is something that is possible, we are still left with the searching question of what **exactly** that entails, and we must certainly not dare even to leave the impression that we have in fact succeeded.

DOES THE BIBLE SAY SO?

(V.Sujatha, Stretford)

Christmas, Good Friday and Easter. These are three well-known festivals that are celebrated by 'Christians' all over the world. But are they important? Did God want us to know about them? Christmas is considered to be the day when Christ was born, but the Bible does not say a word about the day of Christ's birth and there is no religious festival called 'Christmas' in the Bible.

Good Friday is said to be the day when Christ died. Yet, the Bible does not say anything about celebrating Good Friday. People don't celebrate Good Friday as a happy day because Jesus was crucified, but I think Christ would have been happy that day because he had done his Father's will. Also the reason he came on earth and the work that was given to him by his Father was done and he was going back to his Father.

Easter is celebrated as the day when Jesus rose from the dead. Yes, the Bible did say that he arose on the first day of the week but again it says nothing about observing it as a festival (Mark 16 1-6).

Did God want us to attach importance to these days? If yes, then he would have told us so. Any religious practice that is outside the Bible is pointless (Matthew 15:9). We should not think beyond what is written (1Corinthians 4:6). We should go by God's word, the Bible, rather than by what others do. This principle is found throughout the Bible. For example we should not change the gospel. The apostle Paul said "But even if we, or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:8). Also the Word will judge us (John 12:48). We should not add to or take from God's revealed word (Revelation 22:18, 19). The Bible is complete in itself (Jude 3.) It is inspired by God (2 Timothy 3:16,17) (2 Peter 1:19-21).

We should not encourage people to observe festivals not authorized by God in his Word. However, when they are thinking about these things, we can take the opportunity to talk to people about why Jesus was born, died and arose from the dead.

How Wise Was Solomon?

(Rose M Payne)

Solomon was surely the most fortunate of all the Old Testament kings when he began to reign. God had chosen him out of all David's sons to succeed his father and build the temple. David said to the Israelites **"And he (God) said unto me, Solomon thy son, he shall build my house and my courts: for I have chosen him to be my son, and I will be his father"** (1 Chron. 28:6).

God appeared to Solomon twice. The first time he asked Solomon what gift he would like. Solomon replied, **"Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great people?"** (1 Kings 3:9) God was pleased with this reply and added riches and honour, and also long life if Solomon continued to walk in his ways. So his reputation for wisdom spread far and wide. **"And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea shore... And his fame was in all nations round about"** (1 Kings 4:29-31). **"And Solomon reigned over all kingdoms from the river unto the land of the Philistines, and unto the border of Egypt: they brought presents, and served Solomon all the days of his life"** (1 Kings 4:21).

We are told in 1 Kings 4:32-34 that Solomon wrote three thousand proverbs, a thousand and five songs, and had a great deal of knowledge concerning plant and animal life, and kings came to hear his wisdom. Solomon duly built a magnificent temple and when it was finished he made an excellent prayer to the Lord, recorded in 1 Kings 8. God then appeared to him a second time and, while accepting the temple, warned him against going astray and serving other gods (1 Kings 9:6). Possibly Solomon thought he was the last person to need such a warning on that occasion. So what eventually went wrong?

A long time before Solomon's day, there was a prophecy recorded in the book of Deuteronomy that appeared to relate to him. In Deuteronomy 17:14-20 it was foreseen that the Israelites would one day demand to have a king to rule over them, and some warnings were given. Such a king was not to gather a large number of horses (which would be for his army), nor many wives, nor a large quantity of silver and gold. All these things Solomon did. **"And the king made silver and gold at Jerusalem as plenteous as stonesAnd Solomon had horses brought out of Egypt"** (2 Chron. 1:15-16). **"And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines: and his wives turned away his heart"** (1 Kings 11:3).

When Solomon asked the Lord to give him wisdom, it was the kind of wisdom he would need when sitting in judgment, as we see from the story of two women claiming the same child. **"And all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had judged; and they feared the king: for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him, to do judgment"** (1 Kings 3:28). This was not quite the same thing as the inspiration that God gave to the prophets, many of whom were quite ordinary men.

Solomon possibly wrote the Book of Proverbs early in his reign. The theme of this work is **"Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding"**, (Prov. 3:13) because, **"Then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God"** (Prov. 2:9). Much of his good counsel is addressed to "My son" as if he intended to leave the book to his successor.

Very different in tone is the Book of Ecclesiastes or the Preacher, which is presumably a later work of Solomon, who describes himself as a son of David who was king in Jerusalem and sought after wisdom. Here he records the results of his search for

wisdom. In chapter 1 verse 18, he writes **"For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow."** His kind of wisdom was not altogether a blessing to him, but rather a disappointment. Solomon knew all too much about the wicked ways of the world. He was also able to indulge himself in every way and obtain everything he wished for (Ecc. 2:4-10), but in the end found only emptiness, vanity or vexation. His advice is just to enjoy life while you have it, for it will all come to nothing in the end. **'Then I commended mirth because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry'** (Ecc. 8:15). Solomon, with all his wisdom, appears not to be able to offer his readers much hope. He found no satisfaction in the things he had made, because he knew some successor would inherit them. **'Yea, I hated all my labour which I had taken under the sun: because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me'** (Ecc. 2:18). Perhaps by this time he had doubts about the wisdom of the son who was to succeed him. But in the end it was his own fault that his kingdom broke up so quickly.

Finally he tells his readers to **"Fear God and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man"** (Ecc. 12:13), but then he fell short of this himself. In his old age, one can imagine him becoming over-tolerant, and reasoning that every wise person knew that idols were only made of wood or stone and had no real power, so if his foreign wives were foolish enough to want them, they might as well be allowed to have them. Then little by little the wives drew him in to build shrines for them (1 Kings 11:4-10). Long life was no blessing to him, for finally the Lord told him, **'Because you have done this and have not kept my covenant and my statutes as I commanded you, I will tear the kingdom from you and give it to your servant'** (1 Kings 11:11).

Solomon left a great reputation for his wisdom and glory, his building works, and the peace and prosperity of his country. But he could have served for an illustration of 1 Cor. 2:6, **"Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought."**

Just imagine, all those who have been privileged to hear the Gospel are actually wiser than Solomon, for he never heard the full details of the salvation that God was preparing for his servants. If we feel disillusioned with this world, we know that our treasure is laid up in heaven **"where neither rust nor moth doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also"** (Matt. 6:20-21).

European Christian Workshop 2008

Report by Alistair Ferrie

On August 28-30th I was privileged to attend the European Christian Workshop held in wonderful facilities at Lancaster University, England. I would like to commend the organisers of this event. I have attended all three programmes and although each was different in content and different in terms of speakers, each workshop has been a veritable feast. It was a feast in terms of fellowship and it has been a good experience to remind oneself of the strength and wisdom which makes up our fellowship. Sometimes in the midst of our works in various locations we are fooled into thinking that our fellowship can be small and perhaps lacking in vision and resources. Attending such an event explodes this myth.

70 Christians from all over Europe and the USA attended the workshop this year. There were members of the Church from: Austria, Belgium, England, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Romania, Scotland, Spain, United States and Wales.

The food and accommodation were excellent and the facilities in terms of lecture halls, computer and electronic visual aids helpful. Each speaker brought a wealth of wisdom, insight and information to edify us. There were practical sessions such as those that dealt with the "Friendspeak" programme, and deaf ministry as well as in-depth expository study and two quite different but equally instructive approaches to looking at evangelism in the 21st century. There were other sessions I was not able to experience because I could not be in more than one place at a time. However one of the great benefits of the European Christian Workshop is that all sessions are available to listen to later on CD. I have no doubt that I will be feasting on this for months to come as I listen to presentations I missed. I may get to look forward to being in the car so that I can catch up!

Tony Coffey did a wonderful job as our keynote speaker this year, giving account of his own gracious efforts to share the gospel with those who come from a Roman Catholic background. I believe all of us could learn something from his attitudes towards those who are in need of Jesus, and reflect those attitudes whatever our own background before putting on the Lord Christ. I believe that all of us were uplifted as we came to consider more closely the marvellous grace of our God and Father, and the wonderful love of our Saviour, Jesus.

I am looking forward to next year. The European Christian Workshop has quickly established itself in our calendar and is the only lectureship programme I can think of in this country. It seems to me that we need such a programme among us that we can go and be fed and inspired to learn continually to "raise our game" for the sake of the Master.

Obituary **Sir Isabella Davidson Craik**

Newtongrange, Scotland.

Our dear sister in Christ, Isabella (Isabel) Davidson Craik passed away on 21st July 2008. Isabel was born in Mauchline, Ayrshire on 28th January 1921. Sadly her brothers and sister died in infancy with only one sister, Margaret, surviving until her 56th year. She moved to Easthouses and then to Newtongrange on her marriage to Robert Craik. She had two children, Isabel and Robert, who married Ghislaine, and gave Isabel two grandchildren, Lewis and Simon. Isabel's husband died in 1968. She started going to the Ladies' Class at Newtongrange and soon began coming to the Sunday evening Gospel meetings where the scheme of redemption was being taught. In October 1998 she gave her life to Christ and was baptized at the age of 77. Sadly Isabel suffered a stroke in January 1999 and as a result became a resident in New Battle Lodge in Mayfield. She managed to attend the morning worship services until it became too

painful to travel. She enjoyed her visits from the ladies of the Church. She recently moved to a new home at Newbyres Village in Gorebridge.

The funeral service was held at Mortonhall Crematorium on Monday 28th July 2008 where Bro. John Kneller of Tranent conducted the service.

M Hunter, Secretary.

News and Information

Ghana Appeal

Dear Brethren, the Ghana fund continues to serve the Lord in that country, not only by saving lives of brethren through medical aid, but saving souls through promoting evangelism. Our Ghanaian brethren zealously preach and teach the gospel in all its purity. As the extent of their efforts is limited by lack of funds the Ghana appeal enables them to extend the valuable work they are doing and this has brought even more souls to Christ.

A brother in a congregation near the Togo border has been evangelising in that neighbouring nation and this received a strong impetus when six other congregations joined him in an intensive 4-day campaign of preaching and teaching. The fund contributed £50 to this event to support their efforts.

After being established in this way a congregation will grow and spread the Word to other villages and so the Lord adds souls to His Kingdom. A brother in one such infant congregation has appealed for a bicycle to enable him to travel further afield with the gospel. The fund provided £50 to make this possible for him. In another congregation two brothers, one who is blind and extremely poor due to his inability to work, are preaching the gospel in their local area, £50 was sent to this congregation to assist them.

There was also a congregation struggling to hold daily evening meetings by the light of 4 small kerosene lamps. So when electricity reached that village the fund was used to pay the connection fee allowing them to have mains electricity. A further £50 was sent to complete internal electrical work.

There is a village congregation that uses its meeting place during the week as a school where the brethren educate children of all ages and ensure they are fed both physically and spiritually. This is an invaluable resource to the local community and gives local children hope of a future and the eternal hope that comes from knowledge of the Word of God. £200 has been given to this congrega-

tion to put a roof on this building. On this, and many other occasions our hearts are warmed to see the evidence of the fruit of the spirit growing in the Ghanaian saints to the honour and glory of God.

An expression of deep gratitude comes from an infant congregation who was supported with £200 for benches, a table, black board and signboard to equip their meetinghouse, and one brother in particular who is 80 and had to have surgery that was also covered by the fund.

Many thanks to all who have helped and continue to help in the plight of our spiritual family in Ghana. All donations should be sent to the fund secretary:

**Peter Sneddon, Ochil View,
Keir Street, Dunblane, FK15 9BP
(cheques to be made payable to
Dennyloanhead Church of Christ).**

Dale Meikle

Dennyloanhead Church of Christ Ghana Fund

I wish to inform all those who donate to the above fund of my resignation as treasurer on 22nd August 2008. May I take this opportunity to thank everyone for the support and encouragement I received during my 8 years of service.

Janet Macdonald

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