

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"

If you show partiality, you commit sin...

His name is Bill. He has wild hair, wears a T-shirt with holes in it, jeans and no shoes. This was, literally, his wardrobe for his entire four years at college. He is brilliant. Kind of esoteric and very, very bright. He became a Christian whilst attending college.

Across the street from his campus is a well-dressed, very conservative church. They want to develop a ministry to the students but are not quite sure how to go about it. One day, Bill decides to go there. He walks in with no shoes, his jeans and T-shirt, and wild hair. The service has already started, and so Bill starts down the aisle looking for a seat.

The church is completely packed, and he can't find a seat. By now, people are really looking a bit uncomfortable, but no one says anything. Bill gets closer and closer and closer to the pulpit, and when he realises there are no seats, he just squats down right on the carpet. Although this is perfectly acceptable behaviour at a college fellowship, trust me, this had never happened in this church before! By now, the people are really uptight, and the tension in the air is thick.

About this time, the preacher realises that from way at the back of the church, a deacon is slowly making his way toward Bill. Now the deacon is in his eighties, has silver-grey hair, and has on a three-piece suit. He is a godly man, very elegant, very dignified and very courtly. He walks with a cane, and, as he starts walking toward this boy, everyone is saying to themselves that you can't blame him for what he's going to do. How can you expect a man of his age and background to understand some college kid sprawled on the floor?

It takes a long time for the man to reach the boy. The church is utterly silent except for the clicking of the man's cane. All eyes are focused on him. You can't even hear anyone breathing. The preacher can't even begin to preach the sermon until the deacon does what he has to do. And now, they see this elderly man drop his cane to the floor. With great difficulty, he lowers himself and sits down next to Bill and worships WITH him so he won't be alone.

Everyone chokes up with emotion. When the preacher regains control, he says, "What I am about to preach you will never remember. What you have just seen, you will never forget. Be careful how you live. You may be the only Bible some people will ever read."

(Source unknown. Received via a circularised email. We apologise if the rights of any party have been infringed.)

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Death and Taxes

(Niall Scobbie, Dennyloanhead)

It was all going too well. The car had just completed its 190,000th mile when I made the fatal mistake. I happened to remark that it wouldn't be too long before I replaced it; from that moment on a car that had given me little trouble started to develop problems.

I was faced with a dilemma. Do I get rid of the car or do I take the chance and have it repaired. How could I be sure that this problem was not going to be the first of many? How could I be sure that if the car were repaired it would run soundly until I planned to replace it? How could I be sure? How could I be certain? It would be true to say that confidence was in short supply.

It seems that people often pursue certainty - trying to find something to place their confidence in. For some it is their social status or lineage and Paul comments on this in his letter to the Christians at Philippi. He writes that if anyone has reason to place confidence in material status then it is he himself. Paul describes himself as a Hebrew of Hebrews, a Jew of pure lineage and in terms of observing the law - a Pharisee. We can imagine Paul saying, 'You want spiritual zeal? I persecuted the Church how much more zealous could you get?' Yet Paul goes on in the 3rd verse of chapter 3 to explain that to those who worship by the Spirit of God, those who glory in Christ Jesus - these people, Paul explains **put no confidence in the flesh**. Paul recognises that an individual's status and position or lineage hold no certainty at the end of the day, so no confidence can be placed in these things.

There is a well-known saying that '*the only certainties in life are death and taxes.*' This appears to us to be such a pessimistic view yet sadly for many this really is the case. For many there are few certainties in life - there is nothing for them to really place their confidence in.

What do you base your confidence upon?

This is a question that is centuries old - it was put to Hezekiah by the King of Assyria. We find these extraordinary events unfolding around 2 Kings chapter 18. The Assyrians were in a position of military might having enjoyed a great deal of success in conquering their enemies at that time - and Judah appeared to them as no challenge, they would surely be taken like all the others. The field commander confronts Hezekiah about his resistance and tries a little psychology. He asks, '**On what are you basing this confidence of yours?**', while pointing out to Hezekiah that no god of any nation previously had ever delivered his land from the hand of the king of Assyria. He makes his case plain, "**who of all the gods of these countries has been able to save his land from me? How then can the LORD deliver Jerusalem from my hand?**"

It is clear to us what the Assyrian commander was basing his confidence upon - his previous military accomplishments, he was no doubt sure that Judah posed no problem for him let alone posed any danger. However the Lord assures Hezekiah

that, **He will not enter this city or shoot an arrow here.** And we read with some astonishment how, **that night the angel of the LORD went out and put to death a hundred and eighty-five thousand men in the Assyrian camp.** For those who survived in the Assyrian camp, I am sure that any confidence they had concerning their future was all but gone on waking to find the 185,000 corpses of the men who, like them, had been certain that Judah and its God did not pose any kind of threat.

Paul teaches the Christian that, unlike the Assyrians, we are not **competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God.** That, although we enjoy a measure of confidence as we stand before our God, that confidence **is ours through Christ.** It is through Christ that, as the Hebrew writer penned, we are **“sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”** (Heb 11:1) We can be sure in Christ because He was the stone laid in Zion as a **“sure foundation, the one who trusts will never be dismayed.”** (Isa 28:16)

The mechanic in the garage could say that theoretically there shouldn't be any more problems with the car, or that he didn't expect there to be any more problems. The fact was however that he couldn't be certain and there was one thing, which was becoming very clear, that there is no substitute for certainty and there is no substitute in the whole wide world for the confidence and certainty that we find in God and our mediator Christ Jesus.

'Firm and Secure while the billows roll..'

I am convinced that God does not want the lives of His children to be ruled by uncertainty; it is such a debilitating condition – robbing us of the great joy that can be ours in Christ Jesus. God wants us to be confident, to be certain – the Psalmist wrote, **“If the LORD delights in a man's way, he makes his steps firm.”** (Psalm 37:23) and the Hebrew writer encourages us that, **“We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.”** (Heb 6:19) and that **“We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first.”** (Heb 3:14)

There exists also an evangelical aspect to the confidence that we have in God, in that I believe that our conviction makes us conspicuous. **“Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.”** (1Pet 3:15) If our hope and our confidence are obvious to those with whom we come into contact, it may give them cause to ask us the question that faced Hezekiah, 'What do you base this confidence upon?', and so allow us an opportunity to explain about the basis of the confidence that we share with Hezekiah.

When an angel of the Lord appeared to Zechariah telling him that his wife would bear him a son in John the Baptist, Zechariah asked, **“How can I be sure of this?”** (Luke 1:18) When God speaks to us from his word may our response not be that offered by Zechariah but rather may it be 'How could I fail to be sure of this?'

When we see advertisements for investments in the stock market they often carry a disclaimer warning would-be investors that the values of shares can go down as well as up. This is not the case with God – we can have complete confidence that he will deliver all that He has promised us for **“When the earth and all its people quake, it is I who hold its pillars firm. Selah.”** (Psalm 75:3)

Word Study Sin

Ian Davidson (Motherwell)

Sin is the greatest weapon of mass destruction the world has known. The master strategist behind it is, of course, Satan himself. Satan is a personality (a fallen archangel), who is out to lead all men and women in the path that ends in hell or everlasting destruction. Actually, hell was created by God for the devil and his angels. (Matthew 25:41). The Adversary knows that his days are numbered and his end is certain, and he is determined to destroy as many human beings as he can. It is not a game to him, but a genuine war. The spiritual struggle is a matter of eternal life or eternal death for all human beings everywhere.

SIN DEFINED

The Bible teaches that, **"all have sinned and come short of the glory of God."** (Romans 3:23). But what exactly is sin? 'Sin is any thought, word, action, or desire contrary to the law of God.' (Cruden's Concordance). 'A transgression against the Divine law and an offence against God.' (Oxford English Dictionary). 'The verb means to depart voluntarily from the path of duty prescribed by God to man; to violate the Divine law in any particular' (Webster's Dictionary). An examination of the Hebrew and Greek words for sin reveals that sin is a missing of the mark; rebellion against God; transgression; lawlessness; ungodliness; unrighteousness; failure of duty to God; disobedience; iniquity; wickedness; wrongdoing; etc. The apostle Paul, for example, saw sin as a very real power that has seized the hearts of men and women. He talked of sin reigning like a king over subjects; ruling like a master over slaves; and acting like an enemy over conquered people. One writer put it this way: 'Sin is not simply an influence or a force; it is a kind of personal demonic power which invades a man and takes up residence within him.'

In the past, I have pointed out to audiences that sin is the enthronement of self and the dethronement of God. Sin is saying to God: 'Not thy will, but mine be done,' instead of **"not my will, but thine be done."** Sin is imperfection. Who can say that he or she is the perfect father or mother, husband or wife, brother or sister, son or daughter? Sin is deliberately refusing to see God in the universe and deliberately refusing to hear Him in His Son. So sin is the revolt against God of an accountable being, the result of a deliberate choice to do one's thing without reference to the will of God. W. Carl Ketcherside has written: 'Sin is flint-hearted and treacherous. And one of its potent weapons is rationalisation. It uses this for self-preservation, seeking to hold captive those who are in its malign grasp and upon whom it feeds as a vicious parasite. Sometimes it approaches delusion from the negative side, sometimes from the positive, but always it has the black hood at hand to drop over the eyes of the victim, while the gallows starkly waits in the background.'

THE INROADS OF SIN

Sin has been watered down in our generation until it is no longer considered as an offence against the Majesty on high, but merely anti-social behaviour. The sinner is regarded more of an eccentric in our culture than an enemy of God. Let me emphasise that sin is rebellion and the word 'rebellion', comes from the Latin *bellum*, war. Sin always creates war. In fact, it creates a war within every rational human being on earth. Paul wrote: **"But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin"**

which is in my members.” (Romans 7:23). He went on to provide the answer to the problem. **“O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.”** (7:24-25). No human system can address the problem of sin. The remedy can only come from God Himself.

The word ‘flesh’ is closely associated with sin. The flesh is the bridgehead through which sin invades the human personality. W.E. Vine says: ‘The flesh stands for corrupt human nature, the dominating element in unregenerate man.’ In his epistle to the Galatians, Paul compares the works of the flesh with the fruit of the Spirit. He writes: **“Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: Adultery, fornication, uncleanness (impurity of mind), lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance (a contentious temper), emulations (jealousies), wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they who do such things shall not enter the kingdom of God.”** (Gal. 5:19-21) This is a terrible list. Someone wrote: ‘Sin evermore increases its power, until all that is noble and excellent is crushed under the tyranny of lust and passion. The Spirit is subjugated by the flesh, reason is perverted, conscience is blunted, the affections are all corrupted and, if this is unchecked, it reaches a point of degradation from which there is no return.’

SIN’S PENALTY

The penalty of sin is death. Death is separation. Sin separates people from God. Adam and Eve died the day they ate the forbidden fruit. God had warned them that this would happen (Genesis 2:17). The world has never been the same since. But Jesus came to save the world, and He did. However, sinful men and women have to respond to His gospel call. Salvation is conditional upon obedience: otherwise all would be saved no matter what.

It is clear from the Scriptures that a minority of mankind is saved. (Matthew 7:14) The vast majority is in the broad way that leads to destruction or eternal death. The minority has found a new life in Jesus. Life is union. Life is union with God. Jesus said: **“I have come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.”** (John 10:10b). Jesus spells LIFE!

I recall a brother in Christ once saying that if he were granted one wish in the world then it would be to make all sinners see they are sinners in the sight of God. Universal recognition would produce universal reconciliation. Sadly, his wish will not come to pass. In any event, mankind is without excuse because of all that God has done, especially in the person of His Son, Christ Jesus. Men and women are special. They are made in the image of God. But there is something clearly wrong with their make-up. That something is sin. G.K. Chesterton once said: ‘Whatever is true of man, man is not what he was meant to be.’ Sin has marred the beauty and symmetry of his character. There is much more that could be written on this subject, but let me close with some words by Alexander Campbell: ‘To limit contagion of sin, to prevent its recurrence in any portion of the universe, and to save sinners from its ruinous consequences, are the godlike purposes of the common Father of all.’

(One of my earliest Sunday School memories at Albert Street, Wigan was being led by the late Bro. Jack Parker in singing that simple chorus that had the words, ‘S-I-N is a very little word, but it always spells disaster; I must leave it very much alone, or it will become my master.’ They don’t write them like that any more!! Editor.)



The letter containing this month's question concerns 'antichrist' and 'the man of lawlessness', (in the A.V., is called 'the man of sin'). Here is the question.

"1st John 2:18 refers to 'antichrist' and 'the antichrist'; are Satan and the lawless man of 2nd Thess. 2 one and the same?"

Are the events described in 2nd Thess. 2. in the future and do some Christians face a terrible persecution?

Are all people who deny the Sonship and incarnation of Jesus to be regarded as antichrists, or is the term reserved for N.T. gnosticism and docetism?"

In dealing with the questions I would like, first, to make an observation about the opening statement; '1st John 2:18 refers to 'antichrists' and 'the antichrist'; and then we should be ready to consider the three questions raised in the 'question', which I have numbered for the sake of clarity.

- (1) *Are Satan and the lawless man of 2nd Thess.2 one and the same?*
- (2) *Are the events described in 2nd Thess.2 in the future and do some Christians face a terrible persecution?*
- (3) *Are all people who deny the Sonship and incarnation of Jesus to be regarded as antichrists, or is the term reserved for NT gnosticism and docetism?"*

About the opening statement. It is important that we should notice that nowhere does John use the term 'The Antichrist'. In fact, in the New Testament scriptures the word '*antichristos*' is unique to John's first and second letters, and the definite article is not found in the Greek text. The word simply means '*against Christ*', and it is used in an adjectival sense. In other words, it is not used as a title, but defines an attitude or disposition of rejection of the Christ. This becomes evident if we summarize what John wrote.

In his first letter Chapter 2:18, he introduced the subject:-

- I. **"You have heard"**, - in these words he implied that he was reminding them of something about which they had already been forewarned. (Paul uses similar language in 2nd Thess. 2:5)
- II. **"that antichrist is coming"**. Notice that he used the future tense.
- III. **"even now there are many antichrists"**. He revealed that this opposition to Christ already existed. (Paul endorses this in 2nd Thess.2:7).
- IV. "He is antichrist, who denies the Father and the Son". John then defined the word 'antichrist' in terms which cannot be misunderstood.

This definition is expanded at verse 7 of his second letter, where he declared that **"many deceivers have gone out into the world"**; people **"who do not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh: any such person is a deceiver and an antichrist."**

So, according to the literal definition of the word, '*antichristos*' means contra, or against Christ. It does not describe one who *claims* to be the Christ or who usurps the authority of the Christ, but identifies one who *denies* the identity of Christ and His authority. The Lord himself said, **"He who is not with me is against me."** (Matt.12:30).

In fact, John did use the word '*pseudochristos*' in referring to those whom he described as '*antichrist*'. He was not writing about '*false Christs*' nor was he accusing these people of claiming to be Christ. According to Matt. 24:24; and Mark 13:22, '*pseudochristos*' was the term use by the Lord Himself in answering His disciples' questions about the destruction of the Temple.

How, then, has the concept of '*The Antichrist*' arisen? Why has this attitude of opposition to Christ become 'personified'? To find the answer to this question it is necessary to go back to the Old Testament scriptures. After the Babylonian Captivity there grew up among the Jews a belief which declared that, at some time in the future, *someone* or *some power*, would come to wage war against the people of God. They believed that this enemy of the God's people would appear before the coming of the Messiah and would be defeated by 'the Coming One' (i.e., the Messiah).

There are several passages, notably in the Book of Daniel, which relate to the future of the Kingdom of Judah after Captivity, and which contain references to this coming conflict and the one who would instigate it. (See Dan.7 vv 8,20,24: 11:36f). It is surely not difficult, then, to appreciate that the early Christians, and the Jewish Christians in particular who were certainly familiar with the Old Covenant scriptures and who recognised themselves as the true spiritual people of God, would find it easy to relate to this idea.

When Paul wrote 2ndThessalonians, he knew that his readers were concerned about the Lord's return, believing that it was imminent. But, in Chapter 2, he pointed out that the return of the Christ would be preceded by a falling-away from the faith and by the revelation (*apokalupsis*) of 'the man of sin', whom he further describes as 'the son of perdition'.

However, when we try to identify this 'man of sin', we run into difficulties! Are we to look for an evil person or an evil system or organisation? We may immediately rule out the notion that a *system or organisation* is indicated because Paul said that 'the son of perdition' would be identified by his conduct.

- a) He would *oppose and exalt himself against every so-called god or object of worship.*
- b) He would *take his seat in the temple of God.*
- c) He would *claim to be God.*
- d) Although *not himself Satan*, he would be the tool of Satan, since his coming would be 'by the activity of Satan'.

These identification marks certainly appear to point to an evil individual rather than to an organisation. When Paul wrote these things it is understandable that, in the light of the persecution being suffered by the Church, these early Christians thought that this was a reference to the power of the Roman Empire, and, even more particularly, to one or other of several Emperors personally responsible for instigating religious persecution.

It was widely known, for instance, that the Emperor Caligula had planned to erect an image of himself in the Temple in Jerusalem, believing himself to be a god, so the connection was not difficult to make. Since, however, Caligula was assassinated in 41 A.D., and Paul wrote 2nd Thessalonians ten years later, Caligula, vicious man though he undoubtedly was, could not possibly be the person to whom the passage refers. [In any case, Paul clearly predicted that this person would make his appearance at some time in the future].

Closer to our own time, the Protestant Reformers were convinced that the occupant of the Vatican throne was the one concerning whom Paul had prophesied, and no doubt there are still some folk who hold this view.

Let me, then, summarize my answer to the questions.

1. Satan and the 'man of sin' are not the same person. Satan is nowhere in the Scriptures described in human terms. He is never called a 'man'. The man of sin is his tool.
2. Since the events described by Paul in 2nd Thess., must precede the Lord's return, it is reasonable to believe that there will, indeed, be a *future* time of persecution, and John is warning his readers that, at some time in the future, there would be a intensification of the rejection of, and opposition to, Christ which already existed in his own days. Is not this the thought behind the rhetorical question posed by the Lord Himself?
"When the Son of Man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" Luke 18:8.
3. Although it is true that the 'Docetics' denied that the Lord's body was human but only 'seemed to be real'; and the 'Gnostics' claimed that Jesus was only 'a messenger of the supreme God', sent to bring 'gnosis'- knowledge', the scriptures make it abundantly clear that *anyone* who denies the Father and the Son is an 'antichrist', 1 John 2:22, no matter the reason for the denial.

After nearly 2000 years the situation has not changed. By means of the preaching of the Gospel, the Holy Spirit continues to bear testimony to the fact that *Jesus is the Christ, the son of the Living God*, and anyone who hears this testimony, understands it and refuses to believe it, is antichrist and stands under condemnation. We still need to preach Matt. 28:18-20.

(Questions please to: **Frank Worgan, 11, Stanier Road, Corby, Northants. NN18 1XP**)

Editorial

The Price of Freedom

Some time ago I read the book of the life of Nelson Mandela entitled "A Long Walk to Freedom" and was reminded again of this by the recent meeting of the England football squad with Mr. Mandela. It is of course a remarkable story and perhaps the most intriguing aspect of all is the transformation of the perception of Mr. Mandela from that of a 'terrorist' (in the eyes of many people and much of the British press during the 60's when the activities of the anti-apartheid group

known as the African National Congress were at their height) to 'the most respected statesman in the world', which is how he is now almost universally described.

The story of Mr. Mandela's life provokes a lot of questions. Do the ends ever justify the means? Although the ANC, of which Mandela became a prominent leader, initially adopted a policy of 'civil disobedience' in its attempts to overturn the iniquitous apartheid policies of the then South African regime, ultimately the ANC leadership took up arms in the struggle against the white supremacist government of the day. Can the Christian, armed with the knowledge of Paul's teaching about our relationship with and responsibilities towards authorities, ever condone the approach that was taken, irrespective of the good, in terms of a more just and equitable society (by no means perfect yet) that has ultimately emerged from the ANC's activities. Of course the ANC was the party of the indigenous black population of South Africa, which was ruthlessly repressed by being denied access to stable homes, land and education. They were confined to squalid townships, denied a democratic franchise and economic poverty was used as a tool of their repression.

Justice withheld

History seems to teach that authorities are generally reluctant to concede power to the people and that they have to be 'persuaded', by fair means or foul, to change. So women had to take direct action to win the right to vote; workers had to organize themselves into groups to have the communal strength to take 'industrial action' to win decent working conditions. Seven thousand students were killed in Tiananmen Square in China during a protest in favour of democracy. Lech Walesa led a popular uprising in Poland against the then Communist regime. These are only a few examples from recent history but I think they demonstrate the point that 'authorities' do not willingly concede 'rights' and influence to people. They have to be fought for. There are still so many countries around the world in which 'the people' are oppressed and the means of maintaining such oppression is through fear, based on terror of the actions of the authorities by dissidents.

Why is it that the struggle for justice has to be so intense and forbidding? Why cannot the inherent justice of a cause be recognized by those in authority and conceded or accommodated without the need for suffering and deprivations and, yes, sometimes even bloodshed to achieve a position that justice demands? Why would a regime such as that which existed in South Africa go to such lengths and with such violence purposely deny education, homes, land and economic well-being to a majority of that country's population? I'm not trying to rake over old issues here, just asking some questions about human nature. Fear, I think is the key! Fear that by enfranchising all people, control is lost and the comfortable stability of the status quo disturbed; that cherished authority and power will be lost or diluted; that privileges (if basic human rights can be classed as such) are only privileges if they are denied to the many and preserved as the unique prerogative of the few.

I become more acutely aware that most, if not all of the liberties and freedoms which I so easily take for granted have been hard won over the centuries by people who

have been prepared to confront authorities, often to their own detriment. Mr. Mandela and others won freedom from repression for the majority, by ultimately having their own freedom taken, in Mr. Mandela's case by, I think, 26 years of imprisonment on the bleak and inhospitable Rodden Island. And that is the paradox – the liberties and freedoms that we take for granted have often been won at the expense of such rights to the visionary (though they are very often not seen as such at the time) who has sacrificed his or her own freedoms for the benefit of the many.

Freedom offered

How different, but in so many ways how similar is the Gospel of redeeming love that our Saviour Jesus, at the behest of God, brought to the world. Different because God, who has supreme authority over the world, purposed a plan to **offer** freedom to all. Similar because that offer was conditional upon a personal and vicarious sacrifice by no less than the Son of God. The world, if only it would recognize it, has a gospel which tells that perfect love casts out fear; a gospel which teaches that all men and women are equal in the eyes of the Creator God; which teaches that authority can and should be exercised in a spirit of love, humility and compassion; a gospel that seeks to be inclusive of all people. We Christians should be proud of this gospel because it genuinely represents a standard of human conduct and relationship, which, when properly applied, is dramatically more humane, compassionate, just and loving than anything the world can offer.

The history of the world is littered with individuals and organizations that have won progress for the many by the sacrifice of the few. People who in some cases have been branded as troublemakers, activists, dissidents, criminals and worse for daring to challenge the authority of the day (even though in a democracy such authorities only have power by virtue of the delegated authority of the people). Yet often their struggle will be for basic rights and justice for the oppressed and the downtrodden.

And once there was a man, the Son of God, who out of sheer and undiluted love for his fallen creation was the very essence of self-sacrifice. He too was condemned by the authorities of the day for his actions. He, too, was thought of by many as a troublemaker. He too suffered distress and deprivations in the course of winning freedom for his people, freedom that without him would never have been achieved. Because what he won for those whom he loved was freedom from sin; freedom from the cause of our separation from God.

The price of freedom

Consider Jesus, who changed the course of human history forever and offered to every man and woman the opportunity to be elevated to an undeserved and unmerited status, but yet a status that enables us to partake in those privileges that rightly only belong to one person. Jesus had no freedom because he was a willing prisoner to the will of His Father; had no 'position' (but overwhelming authority) because he willingly denied Himself his deserved status in heaven; had no comfort as he continuously challenged the religious and social authority of the day.

Sometimes, with the effluxion of time, it is easy to overlook the blood, sweat and tears that have been expended by people to win some of the physical freedoms that we enjoy today. It does us no credit as we take them for granted. But let us never, ever forget the divine price of our freedom from sin. **"You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. He was destined before the foundation of the world but was made manifest at the end of times for your sake."** (1Peter 1: 18-20)



Foundations of the Faith

A series of studies into the foundational truths of the Christian

THE AUTHORITY & AUTHENTICITY OF THE BIBLE

It is absolutely necessary that we believe in the authority of the Bible. If we don't, and yet teach from it, then we may be guilty of giving unauthorized teaching.

If we believe it at all, then we must believe all of it, for what authority do we have to leave anything out that God has authorized. Therefore we must believe the Bible to be:

- ✓ Revelation from God
- ✓ Inspired by God
- ✓ Carrying the Authority of God.

What is so important about 'revelation'? The word is derived from a Latin noun meaning 'unveiling'. This indicates that God has taken the initiative in making Himself known. It ought to be plain that if God had not made Himself known then we could not have known of Him. The words of Zophar to Job are significant, "**Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?**" (Job 11:7) Paul in 1 Cor. 2:11 says, "**So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.**"

IF WE EVER ARE TO KNOW GOD, HE MUST MAKE HIMSELF KNOWN.

Inspiration is the way that God has chosen to reveal Himself. Sometimes we may say that a musician has given an inspired performance; but that is not the way the word should be interpreted in relation to the Scriptures.

The word has a special and precise meaning in the Bible; it means God-breathed. We must not interpret this phrase to mean that somehow God 'breathed into' the writers or the writings. Rather, that which was by men was 'breathed-out' by God. He spoke through the writers; they became his 'mouthpiece', not his dictating machines. Paul wrote to Timothy, "**All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.**" (2 Tim. 3:16)

It must be understood that when we speak about inspiration we mean 'verbal inspiration'. The inspiration extended to the very words used by the human authors. In his first letter to Corinth, Paul says: "**Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is from God; that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit.**"

You will notice that the words came not from man's wisdom...they were taught by the Holy Spirit. This is hardly surprising when we realize that Jesus made a promise to His apostles, "**And I will pray the Father, and He... shall give you another Counsellor... even the Spirit of truth...**" John 14:16,17. In John 16:13 we read, "**When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth.**"

Authority is the power that necessarily comes from divine revelation and inspiration. In one incident Jesus charged the Apostles to wait in Jerusalem, "**But wait for the**

promise of the Father... But you shall receive power, when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.” (Acts 1: 4,5,8)

God’s word carries authority. It is because of who He is that we should believe what He says. Let us illustrate the power and authority of God by retelling an incident from the life of Jesus. Jesus had taught the people from Peter’s boat and after he had finished teaching said to Peter, **“Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.”** Peter had fished all night on the lake of Galilee and caught nothing. **“Master, we have toiled all night, and have taken nothing; nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net.”** (Luke 5:4,5) On doing this, the nets were enclosed with fish to the point of breaking.

AT THY WORD. I suggest that those words of Peter are at the heart of the authority of the Bible.

Is the Old Testament the authoritative word of God?

There cannot be the slightest doubt about that. The fact that Jesus submitted himself to its teaching regarding conduct is very clear indeed. You will recall his confrontation with Satan. He counters the challenges of Satan with the simple word, GRAPHO (meaning - **it is written**). There could be no argument, no negotiation. It stood written. Where was it written? In the Old Testament scriptures.

Jesus was compelled to carry out His Father’s work. Mark 8:31 reads, **“And he began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things... and after three days rise again.”** Why did Jesus use the word ‘must’? Simply because that was the message of the Scriptures.

When the soldiers took Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, impulsive Peter wanted to defend him with the sword, but Jesus rebuked him saying, **“Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father and he will at once send me more that twelve legions of angels? But how then should the scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so.”** (Matt 26:54)

Luke also records the definite words of Jesus. To the two on the road to Emmaus, He said, O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken. Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” Later on in the same chapter Jesus is more specific: **“...all things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me.”** Could any statement be more comprehensive than that? Yes, Jesus did endorse the Old Testament scriptures. They were the ‘sacred writings’.

Is the New Testament the authoritative word of God?

At this point we encounter an immediate problem. How could Jesus endorse scripture that had not yet been written? Jesus overcame this problem by appointing Apostles.

Luke 6:12,13 records that Jesus went out into a mountain to pray and he prayed all night. Luke’s record then states, **“And when it was day he called his disciples: and chose from them twelve whom he named apostles.”** Luke then names them. The apostles were unique in a number of ways.

1. They were directly commissioned by Jesus, They were to be His PLENIPOTENTIARIES. In Matthew 10:40 we read that Jesus that establishes a

direct line from them, through Himself, to God. **“He who receives you, receives me, and he who receives me receives him who sent me.”** That statement indicates a strong line of authority (a plenipotentiary speaks with the authority of the one who commissioned him).

The exception of course was Paul who was not one of the original twelve. However Acts 26:16,17 records Paul’s own account of the incident on the Damascus road. The Lord says to Paul, **“But rise and stand upon your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you to serve and bear witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, delivering you from the people and the Gentiles – to whom I send you...”**

Paul always states his authority for the things he writes. He opens his letter to the Churches in Galatia, **“Paul, an apostle - not from men, nor through man, but through Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead...”** (Gal. 1:1)

2. The Apostles had to be witnesses of all that Jesus said and did. Jesus told them that there were things that they couldn’t bear at the time he left them, but they would receive the Holy Spirit to guide them into all truth. In 1 Cor. 15:8,9 Paul says: **“Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me (here he must mean the Damascus road experience). For I am the least of the Apostles ...But by the grace of God I am what I am.”**

At the start of his first letter, John states the Apostles’ credentials as to their witness of Jesus, “(that) which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes which we looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life – the life was made manifest and we saw it, and testify to it ...that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you...” (John 1: 1-3)

Luke, although not an apostle, was a companion and friend of Paul, insists that his Gospel record is based on the narrative of eye-witnesses to and ministers of **“the things which have been accomplished among us,”** and that he has **“followed all things closely (or accurately)”** to provide an orderly account of events.

3. These same Apostles also had the power to work miracles and many instances of their power in this respect can be read in the New Testament. And as Jesus had promised they had the power of the Holy Spirit to confirm the message they proclaimed so forcefully about the events they had seen.

What, then, can we conclude?

The New Testament scriptures relate to us the history of life, death and resurrection of Christ. That record is the work of the Holy Spirit working through those who were faithful eye-witnesses and recorders of the things that they saw and heard. The historical record is true and to this day nothing has undermined its authority or veracity.

The Old Covenant scriptures, with their history, emphasis on the Law and their Messianic prophecies (all of them fulfilled in due time) point us unerringly to the culmination of God’s work completed in Christ and ushering in the new life in Christ Jesus. No less an authority than Jesus himself confirms them.

ALL ARE AUTHORITATIVE BECAUSE THEY CARRY THE AUTHORITY OF THE PERSON BEHIND THEM, GOD HIMSELF.

Biblical Archaeology 6

Ian Davidson (Motherwell)

Banias comes from the Arabic pronunciation of Paneas, a place named after the famous Greek god Pan. Here, at the foot of Mount Hermon, Greek worshippers dedicated a cave and its spring to Pan, the half-goat and half man, who tended to frequent lonely mountainsides and caves. The spring itself is probably the source of the river Jordan.

Banias is better known to NT students as Caesarea Philippi, named in honour of Tiberius Caesar and Philip the tetrarch. The addition 'Philippi' was to distinguish it from Caesarea Maritima, the Roman metropolis of Judea. The latter was, of course, the abode of Cornelius and Philip the evangelist. Caesarea Philippi is famed as the place of Peter's confession (Matthew 16:13f.). As one writer has put it: 'The Roman interests were joined with the pagan, Greek and Jewish concerns at this spot... The great question of Jesus was not asked in Jerusalem, the religious centre of Judaism in the world. It was not asked along the shores of Galilee, the teeming commercial centre of Palestine. Instead, He waited until He stood at the foot of the Prince's Mount.'

Excavations at ancient Caesarea Philippi in 2002 were directed by Vassilios Tzaferis (Israel Antiquities Authority) and Charles Page (Jerusalem Centre for Biblical Studies). The work has centred on a palace of Agrippa, the king who heard the apostle Paul's impassioned defence of the gospel. The palace remains were first discovered in 1993. This site has always been known for its "masses of building stone, pieces of broken columns, and half-buried arches..." (Thompson's Chain-Reference Bible).

The first site of our next field trip was Qatzrin, one of approximately thirty villages in the central Golan. Its ancient synagogue is the best preserved in the region. Anne Killebrew, who, at the time, was a lecturer in Foreign Students Programme at Hebrew University in Jerusalem, had directed the reconstruction, in detail, of one of the houses. This helped to recreate the atmosphere of a traditional Jewish house of the fourth century AD.

From Qatzrin, we travelled to Tel Hadar and the Land of Geshur Project on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, one of the most beautiful spots in all Israel. Geshur was one of the Aramean kingdoms (2 Samuel 15:8). King David conquered Geshur (2 Samuel 8:3-8) and married a Geshurite princess, who gave birth to his son Absalom. Absalom spent three years in Geshur following the killing of his brother Amnon for the rape of their sister (2 Samuel 13:1-39). The Project uncovered an 11th century BC palace; an intact granary, one room filled with wheat; fortifications; Aramean inscriptions and figurines. Ira Spar, of Rampao College New Jersey U.S.A., was one of the site directors who guided us around the place. He later took a group of us to one of the wealthy conservative synagogues in Jerusalem to welcome in the Jewish Sabbath. He explained the whole service as it went along and I found it all fascinating stuff. Mary was not permitted to sit with me on this occasion, but was seated with all the other ladies in an upstairs tier.

After Tel Hadar, we travelled to Kibutz Ginosar to admire the Sea of Galilee boat, commonly known as the 'Jesus Boat.' This wooden boat had been discovered in mid-January 1986 by two members of Kibbutz Ginosar, Moshe and Yuval Lufan. The discovery was made following a drought in the region and the inevitable drop in the water levels. The boat, 8.2 m long and 2.3 m at its maximum breadth, was probably used for fishing and transport of people and cargo between the first century BC and the late first century AD. It could have been sailed or rowed by a crew consisting of four oarsmen and a helmsman. This vessel provides a major contribution to the study of water transport and the history of the Galilee area. It is a very significant find.

Next, we moved on to Sepphoris (Hebrew Zippori). A lot of people have never heard of this city because it is not mentioned in the Bible. However, Jesus would have known all about it because it towered over His hometown of Nazareth. Actually, it was the capital of Galilee until about 20 AD when Herod Antipas constructed a new city on the Sea of Galilee, Tiberias, and shifted the capital there. Much has been discovered in Sepphoris, including public buildings, an impressive villa, other private houses, Jewish ritual baths, geometrical mosaics, a street, a large theatre and a synagogue. Sepphoris has a long history. It may have been the site of a Persian garrison during the fifth and fourth centuries BC. Later it became a Seleucid fort constructed by either Antiochus III or his successor, Antiochus IV.

Archaeological evidence indicates the presence of a Jewish community during the Hasmonean period. In 4 BC, Judas son of Ezekias led a brief insurrection against Rome with the result: Sepphoris was burnt and the rebels enslaved. During the reign of Antoninus Pius, Sepphoris has a change of name – Diocaesarea. In the third and fourth centuries AD, the city becomes a key rabbinic centre.

We were shown round the site by Professor Ehud Netzer of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Prof. Netzer is a world authority on Herodian architecture. I met him again recently in Manchester. He addressed a meeting of the Anglo-Israel Archaeological Society. I think I was the only Gentile present. His slide presentation was on Herodium, the burial place of Herod the Great. Prof. Netzer is trying to find Herod's tomb, but is fearful that ancient robbers have got there first. Josephus wrote of Herod's burial: 'The body was carried upon a golden bier, embroidered with very precious stones of great variety, and it was covered over with purple, as well as the body itself; he had a diadem upon his head, and above it a crown of gold; he had also a sceptre in his right hand.' (Antiquities book xvii, chapter viii, Section 3).

From Sepphoris, we travelled to the great modern city of Tel Aviv. Today, it boasts a population of 354,000 – second only to Jerusalem (657,500). The name "Tel Aviv" is actually found in the Bible in the form of 'Tel-abib.' We read: **"Then I came to them of the captivity at Tel-abib that dwelt by the river of Chebar, and I sat where they sat, and remained there astonished among them seven days."** (Ezekiel 3:15). So Tel Aviv will always remind the Israelis of the captivity of their ancestors in Babylon. Babylon itself has been in the news recently because it is sited in modern Iraq. One of the great tragedies of the recent war was the looting of the Iraq Museum in Baghdad. The loss of many ancient artefacts has pained countless people, including myself. Mesopotamia is the cradle of civilisation. Barbarianism, sadly, is still with us, and all too common.

News and Information

Ghana Appeal

N.B. THIS MONTH'S REPORT
CONTAINS SOME SPECIFIC AND
URGENT REQUESTS FOR FINANCIAL
HELP - Editor

Brethren, your donations have contributed greatly in extending the spread of the Gospel as well as saving lives through medical care. The need now is as great as ever and we call urgently on your help.

Dry weather in the north of Ghana has resulted in severe bush fires. Brethren there have not only lost their homes in this fire, but also their possessions and their crops. As their crops not only provide them with food, but their only income as merchandise for the market, this leaves them with virtually nothing. The fire has also destroyed the church meeting place.

Can we respond to this great need for our brethren who are left with absolutely nothing?

The government has introduced a scheme for the supply of water through boreholes under which it would contribute 90% of the cost, with the people paying the remaining 10%. Clean drinking water is essential and while this would supply an urgent need in villages generally, the need is even greater in the stricken northern region. Can we help our brethren there to obtain this essential commodity?

Our Ghanaian brethren are zealous in proclaiming the Gospel and have asked for teaching material for children. Study

material for adults is also needed and we have had a particular request for a study bible, preferably NIV as well as another for a Thompson Chain Reference Bible. If anyone has such items to spare we would be delighted to pass them on.

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

Obituary

Ina Gardiner

Edinburgh. June 1926 - May 2003

Born into the family of John and Chrissie Moyes of Thornton, Fife, Christina (Ina) Cameron Wilson Gardiner was the oldest and only daughter in a family of 5 children. Her parents and grandparents (Seath) were members of the church in Coaltown of Balgownie, a village close to their home. She was added to the Church as a teenager and moved to worship with the church in Rose Street, Kirkcaldy in 1946.

In June 1950 she married Andrew Gardiner in the Rose Street Chapel. At that time Andrew was an evangelist, acting under the eldership of the Hospital street congregation in Glasgow and later under the eldership of Kirkcaldy congregation. They set up their home in Thornton from which Andrew served various churches in the UK until 1957. In August 1954 their son, Alvin was born and their daughter, Melanie, was born in June 1959. In 1960 the family moved to Edinburgh to work in establishing the Hyvot's Bank and Sighthill congregations.

Ina was committed to Andrew and his chosen vocation and was very supportive to him as the wife of an evangelist and later the wife of an elder. Her hospitality was generous to members of the Church from her locality, from other parts of the country and various parts of the world. She was a loving mother, grandmother, great grandmother, sister and friend. She was always interested in the welfare of her family and she was a great support and encouragement to them. She was also an encourager of members of the Church, and a shoulder for some of them to cry on.

The love and respect in which she was held was shown by the turn out at the funeral service on Saturday 10th May 2003 at Mortonhall Crematorium in Edinburgh (about 200 people), which was conducted by the writer.

Her last ten weeks or so were distressing to her and her close family and we are thankful that the Lord in His mercy has now taken her to be with Him at the end of a long, happy and fruitful life.

The following words were penned by her daughter, Melanie, between her mother's death and the funeral service and were published in the hymn sheet:

A Final Step

A final step away from struggling and pain

A final step away from weakness and frailty

A final step away from worry and care

A final step away from loneliness and loss

A final step as darkness closes round and quiet falls

A final step out into glorious light and colour, celestial; song, unspeakable joy, eternal peace with the hand of Jesus to take her home.

Robert Hughes,
Kirkcaldy.

Coming Events

Peterhead
Merchant Street

Sunday 15th - Sunday 22nd
June 2003

Meetings at 7.00pm each evening
(including Sunday meetings)

Speaker:
Bruce MacLarty

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