

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 **From My Perspective**

It must be about two years ago now that Bill, my next door neighbour, approached me to tell me that he was thinking about building an extension to his garage. Now Bill's garage forms part of the boundary between our houses and I was pleased (but not surprised because Bill and his wife are good people) that he was neighbourly enough to let me know of his plans and to ask for my reaction to them. He needn't have done that and could of course have submitted his plans for planning approval and left me to raise any objections that I might have had through the official channels.

Next time I saw Bill I thanked him for his consideration in asking for our thoughts about his plans and went on to tell him that whatever he chose to do we certainly would not be falling out with him about his proposed extension. However I did tell him that there were two things that troubled me. Firstly the proposed extension would block out the late afternoon and early evening sunshine from a favourite part of our garden; secondly our aspect would become brick wall rather than the attractive frontage of his home (Bill and Doreen have a very nice house). At which point Bill said something that pulled me up short. 'That's part of the problem for us', he said. 'You see when we look out from our house towards yours, the side elevation we see is the one with all the waste pipes on it which is not particularly attractive'.

You will not be surprised to learn that I had never given one moment's thought to our neighbour's view. And as I turned and looked at the view of our house that they saw, I immediately understood for the first time what he meant. Everything that I had said to Bill was from my perspective without any consideration for his. Not long after, I planted some shrubs against the wall

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where the extension was planned to go so that if Bill did go ahead at least they would cover some of the new brickwork. As it happens the extension was never built and latterly the tops of some shrubs that Bill planted on his side are showing through and so gradually between us we are improving the view from his property – a great solution for both of us.

I learned a valuable lesson that day and since then I have tried, not altogether successfully, in discussion, debate or negotiation to see an issue from the other person's point of view as well as my own. I've thought about this very simple analogy. Suppose that you have climbed a mountain peak and there at the top you meet a fellow climber. You have reached the top by two different routes and so your experience of the climb is different. Standing at the same spot, but back to back, you each describe the view, and the experience, to the other person. It is inevitable that the view and the experience of the climb that you describe will be different; but you would have a great deal of difficulty in persuading the other person that he or she is wrong in what is described. If you communicated with each other when one was at the summit of the climb and the other only half way to the top of the mountain, then the differences would be even starker. My neighbour and I were standing pretty well at the same spot as we discussed his extension, but because we were looking in different directions we saw very different things.

During our Christian journey we will inevitably come across Christians who are at very different stages of their spiritual development and by no means will that development be dictated solely by their age or the number of years that a person has been a Christian. Spiritual development will be affected by a person's upbringing, their experiences in life, relationships that have been formed and, perhaps, broken for a number of reasons. We are all influenced by the people that we meet, the teaching we receive, the study that we engage in and so much more. We will meet, and worship with, Christians who are on the foothills and struggling to reach the higher ground; those who are striding purposefully on towards the summit, (but perhaps neglecting to look behind and help those who need a helping hand); others who have been close to the summit but found the rarefied atmosphere too much and who have begun to slip back. Perhaps as they pass us as they slide down we even feel a bit of very unchristian satisfaction at their struggles.

At times we need to put ourselves in the place of our brother or sister in Christ if we are to support them in the way that the apostle, Paul, teaches. We need to see matters from the other person's perspective. At various times in his letters he exhorts his readers to **"restore"** (a man overtaken in any trespass) **"in a spirit of gentleness"**, to **"bear one another's burdens"**, to **"encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all"**. Reminding his Roman readers that not even Christ pleased himself, he exhorts them to have the same attitude with the words, **"We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves;"** Paul also gave this advice to the Romans, **"Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgement on disputable matters."** (Romans 14:1, NIV) Do we have to dumb down our teaching, alter our Christian convictions or water down the Gospel message to apply Paul's very explicit teaching? Of course not! But it does mean taking the time and effort to understand the needs and motivations of our fellow Christian who may not see every matter precisely as I see it.

The reality is that there will be Christians all over our mountain and before we can be of any real help to any one of them we really do need to know how they've got there and what condition they are in. It's little use telling the climber with the spiritual broken leg that it's only another half hours walk to the summit; the injury needs to be treated and healed before further progress can be made. It's no good either shouting from above the cloudline to a Christian who is suddenly caught in a fog that it's an easy walk; their perspective is by now completely distorted and they've lost sight of the summit. Maybe another is tired and is walking with head down, struggling to make one step at a time, rather than having the route carefully mapped out. And so we could go on. I think any of us would make a grave mistake if we attempted to build a strong and faithful Christian community if we assumed every member of the community saw things exactly from our own perspective. It might be a comfortable ideal, but, as Paul recognized, it is far removed from reality. I recently attended a short seminar on Networking and the presenter suggested that in building relationships and understanding other people one should reflect on the acronym – WAIT, which stands for **Why Am I Talking**. Why is that relevant? Because we learn absolutely nothing about the needs, condition or perspective of the other person whilst we are determined only to tell them what we think.

We can take this principle into our discussions with those whom we seek to bring to Christ. It really is no good haranguing a non-Christian with a "because the Bible says so" philosophy if they haven't even started to give any credibility to the authority of the Bible. Jesus listened and responded patiently to the questions of Nicodemus and then to the Samaritan woman at the well. He listened and responded when his disciples told him the crowd needed feeding. He responded to those who put faith in his power to heal. And once he had understood and met their needs, he taught them. Even with his own disciples who were working with him and day by day and witnessing his teachings and actions, Jesus sometimes had to take the time out to patiently explain his purpose and authority. **"Lord, show us the Father,"** implored Philip. Jesus said to him, **"Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know me Philip?"** Even though Jesus carried with him absolute truth and all authority, and even though he was uncompromising in expressing the will of His Father, he understood as well the perspective of those who sought after him.

The point I am trying to make is that whether we are dealing with our brothers and sisters in Christ, or those outside of the Church, it's no use starting our discussions with them from where we are. We have to start from where they are. Even if we are confident that our own spiritual development and our understanding of God's revelation and will for us is well advanced and we can see the road ahead clearly, we must remember that not everyone else is in that fortunate position. Understanding that is maturity; and maturity perhaps finds its clearest expression when Paul, whilst upholding all the finest and most passionately held Christian convictions, was able to say **"To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak."** (1 Cor 9:22)

And finally I think I must remember this too. When I look at God and see His majesty and look towards Jesus and see His overwhelming love and compassion towards me, and I feel a warm glow of security in their attractiveness to me, I must remember that they have a different perspective. They turn and look at me and even now see the waste pipes all too clearly and I understand again that I must nurture the shrubs and shoots of my spiritual development before my imperfections are covered. I'm grateful to Bill for the lesson he taught me.

The Growing Church

Alastair Ferrie.

We would like to see the church grow as never before, grow like the church in the book of Acts grew. If we aim to maintain the status quo, then we will slip back into oblivion. If we aim to go forward then the Lord will take us forward. We have witnessed that Churches that aim only to keep the doors open, end up closing the doors. Christians that aim to do no more than stay alive, end up by dying spiritually. The church is an organism designed and created for growth. A Christian is a new baby, born to grow towards maturity.

Our text for this article is Eph 4:11-24. The growth of the individual is foundational, being no more children but progressing on to maturity in Christ... and this provides the basis for the growth of the Body as a whole... supplying the needs of one another and growing together.

Individual Growth:

Everywhere in the New Testament we see the concept of individual growth. Notice how Paul presents the idea of a person changed by the presence of the Spirit within. This is the evidence of spiritual life, the evidence of salvation, the evidence of conversion. Am I growing as I ought as a Christian? Am I further down the road towards maturity than I was one year ago? Am I more dedicated? Am I more prayerful? Am I more spiritual as a person? Am I more Christ-like in my attitudes, in my speech, in my conduct?

a) In overcoming sin

Note the final verses of our reading in v22-24.

22 Put off your old nature which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful lusts, 23 and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, 24 and put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. 1 Eph 4:22-24.

Each of us struggles with sin in our lives. But maturity may be measured by the extent to which we have been changed, or allowed ourselves to be changed.

Do you have a sin that you have become comfortable with? If you are not to be hindered in your growth towards spiritual maturity, this is the time to address it. How can you expect to grow as you ought to whilst you allow that to flourish and grow within you?

1 "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, 2 looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God." Heb 12:1-2.

We have to be prepared to address the sin which clings so closely. We excuse ourselves for it and we overlook it even if others cannot. Yet the only person I am fooling is myself and the chief person I am hurting is me.

The writer to the Hebrews says, lay aside the sin.

In Rom 8:3-14 Paul says that by the Spirit we are to put to death the deeds of the body! It's time for us to grow as never before and the way to do that is to address the sin.

b) In growing in depth of understanding

As we examine our text we see that this personal growth is very much connected with our growth in personal knowledge and understanding. Note v13-14 in particular.

¹³until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ;¹⁴so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles.

If we are to grow spiritually it will be connected with our growth in knowledge of the Son of God, it will be connected to our growth in understanding so that we will not be confused or turned aside by the false teaching of others.

We could say that our first point is connected with our growing in the grace of Christ in our lives. But notice this passage...

¹⁸But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. 2 Pet 3:18.

Growing people are being changed in their life-styles by the presence of the Spirit and they are being changed in their thinking by the knowledge of Christ and the knowledge of God's ways and thinking.

There is only one way for us to do this and that is to be people of the Book. Indeed throughout all history, the people of God have been people of the Book. And Israel was strong and healthy whenever they had the Book always before them and they meditated on it day and night.

Indeed the Shema prayer that all faithful Jews recited daily had this to say...

⁴"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD;⁵ and you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.⁶ And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart;⁷ and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.⁸ And you shall bind them as a sign upon your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.⁹ And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. 3 Deut 4:6-9.

And as long as Israel lived by this principle they were healthy and strong and they walked with God and God protected them and kept them in His care. But the problem came when Israel ceased to be a people of the Book. And when they turned their back on the Word of God then they ceased to be the people of God, the people of God's covenant. And all was lost. And when there was a period of repentance and the people turned back to God it was always in association with a reading of the Word of God once more.

The way for us to grow will be to be people of the Word of God; to read it and to meditate on it and to teach it to our children and to have it before our eyes night and morning. In this way and in this way alone shall we grow.

c) In growing in depth of commitment

Growing as individuals will ultimately be about commitment. Whether we survive as Christians or fall will be about our commitment to Christ. Is Jesus important to us? Is He the most important thing in our lives? And I mean that quite literally.

The New Testament makes it clear that this is the kind of commitment we need. Not that Christianity has become some kind of interesting hobby or project to be followed through as we have time and as other commitments allow. But that Christianity is the underpinning philosophy of life which governs everything else. We might be a musician or an actor, or a student, or a doctor, or a plumber, or a home maker, or anything else under creation... but being a Christian determines what kind of musician, or actor or student or doctor or plumber or home maker we are.

It is absolute commitment to Christ that must govern everything else. Note how Jesus Himself spoke of this in a number of passages.

23 And he said to all, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. 24 For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake, he will save it. 25 For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? 4 Luke 9:23-25.

Luke is the one who inserts the word "daily" into this statement of Jesus. This emphasizes to us that this is a daily decision. It is not just a one-time decision that we make in order to be baptized into Christ although obviously that is vitally important and something that must be done. But that decision is ratified daily. Every morning when we get out of bed there is a decision to be made. The decision is whether we are going to follow Jesus that day or not.

I remember some years ago speaking to a missionary on his way from Jerusalem back to USA. He had been preaching the gospel in Jerusalem for some time. And as we sat and spoke he told me a story of a young man he had worked with and preached the gospel to. There was immensely strong opposition from the Jews who lived there in Jerusalem. The young man was Jewish. After he became a Christian, members of his family and others kidnapped his children and refused to return them till he recanted and returned to Judaism. That is a price which is very high to pay. The young man returned to Judaism. And God will call those into judgement for their actions.

In Luke 9:57-62, three men come to Jesus and to each the challenge is offered and there is a price to be paid.

1. To the first Jesus tells him that there will be suffering in association with being His disciple. I don't have a bed to sleep in. I don't have a home to live in. Are you prepared for this? There is no indication in the passage that this man was willing to take on this kind of commitment.
2. Let me first go and bury my father. This seems like a harsh moment in the ministry of Jesus. Yet this man's father is probably not dead, probably not even ill or dying. What he is saying is that I have responsibilities at home... let me go back home till my father dies then I will come and be your disciple. Jesus' reply is as powerful as it is enigmatic. Let the spiritually dead take care of your father at home... you come and be my disciple. Apparently there were others who could look after his father at home and this was merely a dodge to evade his commitment to Christ.
3. Let me first go back and say farewell to those at home. This is like the previous person. I will come but not now. He is not talking about someone running in and saying, Bye see you later I'm off to be a disciple of Jesus. He is talking about someone using his family as an excuse to delay following Jesus. Jesus says that turning back means you were not fit for the kingdom in the first place.

This is the key. It is a personal commitment to Christ; a personal commitment to the cause of Christ; a personal commitment to the church of Christ.

Will we grow or stagnate as a church? Will we grow or stagnate as individual Christians? I dare you, I double dare you to make this a time for growth personally and individually for you as a Christian. A time when we make unparalleled progress

- In overcoming sin
- In growing in depth of understanding
- In growing in depth of commitment

Word Study **Patience**

Ian Davidson (Motherwell)

The Bible has a great deal to say about the word "patience". I especially want us to consider the Greek term *hupomone*, which is a beautiful word. There is another Greek word for patience – *makrothumia*. ""*Makrothumia*" will be found to express patience in respect of persons, *hupomone* in respect of things" (R.C. Trench). In fact, *makrothumia* is often the word for "long suffering" in the N.T. Scriptures (A.V.). The Greek term actually comes from two Greek words – *makros* (long) and *thumos* (temper). Those who are long suffering are not those with a short temper.

PASSAGES OF SCRIPTURE

Let us consider some passages where *hupomone* is found. **"But that on the good ground are they, who in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience."** (Luke 8:15). **"And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation works patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope..."** (Romans 5:3, 4) **"For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope."** (Romans 15:4). **"We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of God and our Father."** (1 Thess: 1:2,3) **"But you, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness."** (1 Timothy 6: 11) **"For you have need of patience, that, after you have done the will of God, you might receive the promise."** (Hebrews 10; 36) **"Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which does so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us."** (Hebrews 12:1) **"...knowing this, that the trying of your faith works patience. But let patience have her perfect work that you may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing."** (James 1:3, 4). See also James 5:11; 2 Peter 1:6; Revelation 1:9; 2:2,3,19; 3:10; 13:10 and 14:12). If a saint has to be anything in this world, he has to be patient.

"PATIENCE" DEFINED

But what exactly is *hupomone*? I think it is very easy to lose heart in this modern world. The people of God are surrounded by wickedness of every description. They endure all kinds of trials and tribulations. What they forget is that God could well be putting them to the test to see if they can stand up to the pressures. You see, an untested faith is not worth possessing. So those who are patient are those who, under great siege of trials, never give up and never lose heart. In the end, they are worthy of heaven. William Barclay says that *hupomone* "is the quality which keeps a man on his feet with his face to the wind. It is the virtue which can transmute the hardest trial into glory because beyond the pain it sees the goal". Another writer put it this way: "Patience is steadfast endurance, which causes one to keep on, especially under difficulty, or when facing trial or persecution. It is putting up with things, which go against the grain. It is making allowance for those who do not work the way you would like to see it done. It is resisting the impulse to fly off the handle. And it is

staying with the thing that needs doing even though you are tempted to throw up your hands and walk away from it all." John Chrysostom described *hupomone* as "a root of all the goods, mother of piety, fruit that never withers, a fortress that is never taken, a harbour that knows no storms. It is the queen of virtues, the foundation of right actions, peace in war, calm in tempest, security in plots, and neither the violence of man nor the powers of the evil one can injure it".

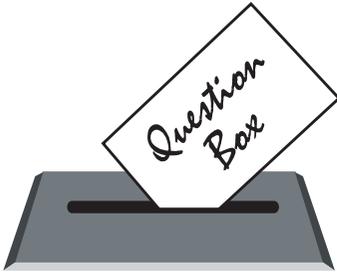
We often talk about "the patience of a saint". *Hupomone* is one of the marks of true sainthood. Many people are fiery and quick-tempered. Actually, the characteristic of *thumos* (one of the Greek words for anger) is that it quickly blazes up and quickly subsides. In other words, *thumos* is the explosive and violent temper, which reveals that the individual is in the grip of the flesh or the sinful human nature. Only the power of the Spirit can help him or her overcome this particular sin. Only the power of the Spirit can change someone from manifesting the spirit of blazing anger to manifesting the spirit of steadfast endurance.

EXAMPLES TO FOLLOW

There are wonderful examples of patient people in the scriptures. There is Job, who is mentioned by James in his epistle (5:11). He was the one whom Satan, under Divine permission, attacked and robbed. Job lost his wealth, his ten children and his health. But he refused to curse God and, in the end, rejected the worldly advice of his three friends Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar. All his suffering and patience led to a restoration of his health, the doubling of his wealth and the gift of another ten children. I think the book of Job is the most profound work of the Old Testament and I think we should all read it more often and be continuously uplifted by the outstanding patience of this great patriarch.

There is the apostle Paul. He not only wrote about *hupomone*, but also manifested it in his life. Frankly, I do not know how Paul patiently endured all his trials and troubles. He was some man! Lesser men would have caved in long before the imprisonment in Rome. But he believed passionately in Jesus and trusted that the Master would see him through and bring him safely to heaven's shore. On one occasion he wrote: **"I have served more prison sentences! I have been beaten times without number. I have faced death again and again. I have been beaten the regulation thirty-nine stripes by the Jews five times. I have been beaten with rods three times. I have been stoned once. I have been shipwrecked three times. I have been twenty-four hours in the open sea. In my travels I have been in constant danger from rivers and floods, from bandits, from my own countrymen, and from pagans. I have faced danger in city streets, danger in the desert, danger on the high seas, danger among false Christians. I have known exhaustion, pain, long vigils, hunger and thirst, doing without meals, cold and lack of clothing. Apart from all the external trials I have the daily burden and responsibility for all the churches."** (2 Cor. 11: 23b-28, J.B. Phillips). Then there is Jesus Himself. He showed patience in perfection with his family, his people, his apostles, his followers, his friends, the weak, the strong, the powerful, the humble, etc. All circumstances, including humiliation and persecution, were overcome in the spirit of *hupomone*. There is no greater example than personal example and Jesus is our example in all things. He was patient; we must be patient too. Many in the world are restless and quick to move. But we in Christ must learn to wait. I like these words I once copied down:

"There is nothing more Christlike than patience. When we are like to lose our patience at the follies and foolishness of men, let us call to mind God's infinite patience with the wanderings and the disloyalties and the unteachability of our own souls."



"What does the Bible teach about Euthanasia?"

This is the question that has been posed by a member of the Church. What prompted it I do not know, but I surmise that it may be that the brother who asked it had been thinking about the instances of Euthanasia which have been reported fairly recently in the national press.

The word itself, '*Euthanasia*', comes from the Greek, the literal meaning of which is '*easy death*', and, as I expect most people know, it is used to describe the act of assisting a person to die

A relatively modern concept

There have been, in recent months several very moving media reports relating to terminally ill patients who have taken this course as a way of escape from the physical disability and pain that made life for them unbearable, and from which they saw no possibility of relief. These gravely ill patients had gone over to mainland Europe, to a country where Euthanasia is apparently not illegal, and where there does not appear to be any strong popular objection to its practice. They have gone abroad in order to seek the help to die which, in a word, British doctors felt unable to give.

The fact is that, in the vast majority of western countries, the practice of Euthanasia is illegal. Their Governments, along with their medical and judicial associations in common with our own, view the whole issue of Euthanasia with distinct unease because of the ethical, religious, social and legal problems it creates.

In the minds of the authorities, the line between '*assisted death*', i.e., Euthanasia, and '*suicide*', is extremely unclear and open to debate. Consequently, those troubled, sick people who determined to end their own lives, had to find a country in which this practice is permitted, and this meant travelling overseas to find some individual or organisation willing to help them to die. This is usually by means of the administration of a lethal mixture of drugs. Because this practice is illegal in this country, and its practice still relatively rare, it was inevitable that their action would make news headlines.

What does the Bible say about Euthanasia?

This is the simple, brief question that has been asked, and the even simpler - and briefer - answer is, Nothing! Of course, as any student of ancient history knows, death by poisoning was not uncommon, before, during or even after, Bible times. Far from it in fact! There are well-known historical instances of it, involving famous people. But, what I would describe as the well-intentioned administration of powerful sedatives in order to end physical suffering and induce a peaceful death, is a relatively modern concept, and even though, as Christians, we cannot approve of it, we can, at least feel genuine compassion for the victims of those illnesses that cause them to think of ending their own lives.

The issues that invariably arise when Euthanasia is discussed are far too complex to be dealt with here - even if I felt competent to handle them - and I candidly confess that I lack the medical and legal expertise to do so.

What I am prepared to say is, that from the Christian standpoint, Euthanasia can no more be justified than can suicide. The basic difference between the two is that '*suicide*' describes *self-inflicted death*, whilst '*euthanasia*' is *assisted death*, and both amount to the unnatural, unauthorized and wilful termination of life. (I realize, of course, that a fatal accident may also be described as '*unnatural and unauthorized death*', but it is not *wilful* death).

'Attempted Euthanasia' in the Scriptures?

I am aware of only one occasion in the entire Bible, when one who was about to die was offered sedation in order to make his death less painful, and, therefore, easier.

If we compare Matt. 27, verses 34 and 48, and also Mark 15, verses 23 and 36, something most interesting and significant emerges. These references remind us that on two occasions after His arrest and trials, Jesus was offered something to drink.

The first time occurred when the crucifixion procession of soldiers and the rulers of the Jews, with Jesus their prisoner, arrived at Golgotha, and before they nailed Him to the cross. Both Matthew and Mark record that it was then that Jesus was offered '*wine mingled with gall*', and that, having tasted it, He refused it.

Both Gospel writers also tell us that some hours later, having endured the agony of crucifixion, Jesus cried, "*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani*". Immediately after this, someone dipped a sponge in sour wine and raised it on a reed to His parched lips. This time He accepted the drink, and then '*dismissed His spirit*'.

What was the difference?

Why did he decline the first drink and then accept the second? The first offer, made just before they crucified Him, was a genuine act of compassion. It was a kindly gesture, usually made by certain compassionate people on such occasions, to prisoners who were about to suffer the intense agony of crucifixion, and was most probably funded by women of Jerusalem. Its purpose is obvious. It was done in order to induce stupor – to dull the senses of the condemned prisoner, so that their dying would be less painful – a kind of 'euthanasia', we might say.

Notice, too, the imperfect tense of the word '*gave*' in '*gave him*', (or, in the R.S.V., '*offered him*'), means, '*they tried to give him*'. The words expressed a sense of concern! They *urged it upon Him*. But, having tasted it, He declined to drink it. He refused it because the wine contained either Hemlock, or, according to Matt.27:34 Gall - the Gall, which, in Bible times was the juice of the opium poppy. Both were powerful tranquilizers.

Jesus knew what was being offered to Him. He would be well aware of the custom, and He also recognized the sympathy this act revealed. So He tasted, acknowledging the kindness. But did not drink. He had committed Himself to doing the will of the Father in becoming the sin-bearer for the whole world, and He would not accept anything that prevented Him from bearing the full weight of the burden of mankind's sin.

It was after the second drink had been offered to Him, and accepted by Him, that He cried "*Tetelestai*" – one word – which, in English has been rendered, "*It is has been accomplished!*" This was His shout of triumph, which indicated that the price of our redemption had been paid. But this time, the drink offered was different. It contained no opiate; no drug. Nothing to dull the senses. What they offered to him was, in fact, the sour wine which was the common, daily drink of the Roman soldiers. It is even probable that it was one of the soldiers who made this kindly gesture. And this time the drink was accepted, because the great work had been done.

The Christian View

Christians have always held the view that one does not have the right to take what he is unable to give. Job's observation, when contemplating the catastrophes that had befallen his own family, was, "**The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD**", and for this we read, "**in all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly.**" (Job 1; 21-22) We should remember that the Lord said, "**My sheep hear my voice. I know them and they follow me. I give to them eternal life and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father who gave them to me is greater than all; and no-one can pluck them out of my Father's hand.**" (John 10; 27-29).

Do we believe that, as children of God, we are in the Father's hand? It is surely impossible for anyone who believes the Saviour's words, to calmly and soberly contemplate ending his own life, or seeking the help of others for the same purpose.

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Foundations of the Faith

A series of studies into the foundational truths of the Christian

THE NECESSITY OF BELIEF IN GOD

It is fundamental to our whole concept of Christianity that we can say with the writer to the Hebrews "he that cometh to God must believe that He is". The reality that God 'is' is not easy to understand. It embodies the past, present and the future. It means that there never has been a time, nor will ever be a time, when God is not present.

God 'caused' everything to be, but He Himself is 'uncaused', i.e. no one ever brought Him into being. He transcends time, ever has been and ever will be. We live in a world where every effect has a corresponding cause (and where we are extremely unhappy if we cannot relate cause and effect to our own satisfaction). The idea then of someone, or something, being 'uncaused' is something that we have to grapple with, but we must believe it and try to understand it.

'He' is given various titles in the Scriptures. He is called 'God', the 'Creator', the 'Almighty', the 'Father' and so much more. The Greek word for deity is THEOS. In the Septuagint, THEOS translates the Hebrew words ELOHIM, which indicates His power and pre-eminence, and JEHOVAH which indicates His eternal and self-sustained existence.

It will be noted that Genesis 1:1 starts with these words, "In the beginning God created....". There was no need to state the obvious fact that in the beginning the God was; the existence of God is taken for granted. HE IS! In the incident when Moses saw the burning bush, and God instructed him to return to Egypt to lead the Israelites out of captivity in Egypt, one of the questions that Moses asked of God was, "Who shall I say has sent me?" The answer of God was, "I AM THAT I AM; you shall say that I AM hath sent you".

When he spoke to the Athenians on Mars Hill, the apostle Paul puts the issue quite plainly to them. **"The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by man; nor is he served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since he himself gives to all men life and breath and everything. And he made from one every nation of men to live on the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation, that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel after him and find him. Yet he is not far from each one of us for 'in Him we live and move and have our being';... 'For we are indeed his offspring'."** (Read Acts 17: 22 - 31)

In Romans chapter 1, Paul maintains that only by "holding down the truth in righteousness" and refusing to have God in their knowledge" was it possible for men to be unaware of the existence of God, and of his everlasting power and divinity. Paul argues that though as God's creation man should have some natural affinity with his creator, rather than progressing towards a deeper and fuller understanding of God they regress to serve other gods. **"For what can be known about God is plain to them because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly**

perceived in the things that have been made.” (Romans 1: 19,20) Paul’s words are a startling denunciation of the Gentile position relative to their lack of belief in the one true God.

That God is in control of all things cannot be in doubt. When Peter spoke to the gathered crowd of eager listeners on the Day of Pentecost after the resurrection of Jesus he charged them with being complicit in the death of Jesus and said, **...“this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.”** (Acts 2:23) Later in their ministry Peter and John reinforce this argument when, addressing God with their friends, they say **“for truly in this city (Jerusalem) there were gathered together against thy holy servant Jesus, whom thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, to do whatever thy hand and thy plan had predestined to take place.”** (Acts 4: 27,28)

Many have said that the character of God displayed in the Old Testament is quite different from that revealed in the New Testament. That the God of the Old Testament is stern and unloving whilst that of the New is loving and forgiving. In Exodus 34:6 it is recorded that God, speaking to Moses, said, **“The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty...”** Again in Joel 2: 12,13 the words of the Lord are recorded, **““Yet even now”, says the Lord, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments.” Return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and repents of evil.”** Now that sounds very much like the long-suffering and loving God revealed to us by Jesus. There were occasions recorded in the Old Testament scriptures when God meted out summary justice for disobedience and rebellion. At the end of time as we understand it, a loving and compassionate God will once again mete out justice for disobedience and rebellion. Summary justice or justice deferred - it is still justice by the same God, using the same criteria.

The God of the Bible, the whole Bible, is an unchanging God therefore His counsel and His acts must, by definition, always be the same. Thus judgement, justice, mercy, compassion and love are all evidences of the characteristic nature of God at all times.

Let us summarise why a belief in God is both necessary and desirable.

- **He is the great Creator and Sustainer of the universe. There have been many who have tried to disprove Him, but without success;**
- **He is the eternal Spirit of Life. The life that He gives is life indeed. It is a life which, if we love Him as He loves us, will eventually take us into His presence to live with him eternally;**
- **He has taught us, and we have experienced, that there is nothing which, and no-one who in this life can give us the security offered by God;**
- **The assurances God has given to us have been written in the blood of His Son;**
- **When we have no merit at all of our own, His grace and mercy rescues us from everlasting separation from God, our creator;**
- **He has promised through His divine nature of love, if we trust Him to the end, to make us his children and to be our eternal, heavenly Father.**

Biblical Archaeology 7

Ian Davidson (Motherwell)

Back in Jerusalem, Mary and I attended some evening lectures, among which was a presentation by Alan R. Millard, now Rankin Senior Lecturer in Hebrew and Ancient Semitic Languages, University of Liverpool. I looked forward to hearing this great Biblical scholar, and he did not disappoint. His subject was *The Tell Fekheriye Inscription* (found on a statue and written in Aramaic). Tell Fekheriye is in north-eastern Syria. I knew Alan Millard from his commentary on Jeremiah in *The New Bible Commentary Revised* and his articles in *The New Bible Dictionary* and *The Lion Handbook of the Bible*. He is also the author of two popular books, which I have in my library: *Treasures from Bible Times* and *Discoveries from the Time of Jesus*. He has excavated in Syria (Arpad and Qadesh), Jordan (Petra) and Iraq (Nimrud), and in 1984 was a Fellow of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

On that same evening Joachim Krecher of the University of Munster, West Germany, presented a paper entitled: *The Ebla Tablets and Their Possible Significance for Biblical Studies*. "Ebla was the name of a city the powerful Babylonian kings Sargon and Naram-Sin claimed they conquered about 2300 and 2250 BC. Scholars had been looking for it for years. Usually they looked near the River Euphrates, 100 miles from Tell Mardikh. In 1975 the answer was made certain. In a building below the big temple (in Tell Mardikh) thousands upon thousands of cuneiform tablets were uncovered and they made the identity of the place clear beyond doubt. Ebla was found!" (Millard). The Ebla tablets are, undoubtedly, one of the outstanding archaeological discoveries of the 1970's. They are valued for their evidence that Babylonian writing spread to north Syria before 2300BC.

Marcel Sigrist of the Ecole Biblique et Archeologique Francaise, Jerusalem informed us about the importance of the Emar tablets. (The site of Meskane-Emar in Upper Euphrates is a late Bronze Age site 1550 – 1200 BC). These tablets are proof positive that "the ceremonies which Israel's Law prescribes are not out of place in the world of the late second millennium." (Millard).

THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS

On another evening in Jerusalem, Mary and I attended a session at the Hebrew University entitled: *Forty Years of Dead Sea Scroll Research*. Later we visited the famous museum that houses the Scrolls – *The Shrine of the Book*, which is not far from Israel's parliament building named the Knesset, the Hebrew word for "synagogue". The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls is the most important find of the twentieth century in Biblical Archaeology.

Where and when were the Scrolls discovered? The first seven scrolls were found in 1947 by a Bedouin shepherd boy in an untouched cave in the Qumran region of the Judean Desert. Four of the scrolls reached the hands of Mar Athanasius Yeshua Samuel, Metropolitan of the Syrian Jacobite Monastery of St. Mark in Jerusalem. Incredibly, it took him five years to find a purchaser. He advertised them, eventually, in the *Wall Street Journal*. The advert came to the attention of Yigael Yadin, son of Prof. E.L. Sukenik of the Hebrew University, Jerusalem. Through intermediaries, the four scrolls were purchased for \$250,000. Part of the purchase price was contributed by D.S. Gottesman of New York, whose heirs later sponsored the construction of the special Scrolls museum in Jerusalem. The search was now on for more scrolls in the Judean caves. Between 1951 and 1956, eleven caves yielded manuscripts. For example, cave 3 yielded the famous Copper Scroll and cave 4 yielded 15,000

fragments. Roland de Vaux, a French Dominican priest of the Ecole Biblique, was one of the archaeologists involved in the excavations.

To whom did the scrolls belong? They probably belonged to a branch of the Essenes, a Jewish religious community which flourished between the first century BC and the first century AD. Interestingly, this group is mentioned neither in the Scrolls nor the Bible. However, we do read of them in the writings of Flavius Josephus, Philo of Alexandria, Pliny the Elder and Hippolytus. F.F. Bruce has written of Philo's description of the Essenes: "They pay scrupulous attention to ceremonial purity...they hold all their property in common, abstain from animal sacrifice, practise celibacy, keep no slaves, make provision for those of their number who are not working by sickness or old age, swear no oaths, take no part in military or commercial activity and in general cultivate all the virtues." Ayala Sussmann and Ruth Peled have written: "Although the evidence is accepted by the majority of scholars as conclusive in identifying the Essenes with the Qumran settlement and the manuscripts found in the surrounding caves, a number of scholars remain vehemently opposed. Some propose that the site was a military garrison or even a winter villa."

What manuscripts of the Old Testament were discovered? Amongst the 500 documents, all of the books of the Bible are represented except the book of Esther. The scrolls of the Bible in Hebrew number about 100. The great majority, sadly, are in a fragmentary condition. However, some are extant in a large number of copies. For example, "Cave 2, first discovered and pilfered by the Bedouin, was excavated between March 10 and 29, 1952. Fragments of about a hundred manuscripts, including two of Exodus, one of Leviticus, four of Numbers, two or three of Deuteronomy, one of Jeremiah, Job, Psalms, and two of Ruth, were found." (Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix).

How old are the Scrolls? Scientists have turned to paleography (ancient writing forms); orthography (spelling) and archaeology to date the finds. W.F. Albright said of the complete Isaiah scroll: "There is no doubt in my mind that the script is more archaic than the Nash papyrus... I should prefer a date around 100 BC..." Most scholars are now of the view that the Qumran manuscripts came from the century before Christ and the first century AD.

How important are the manuscripts as regards textual criticism? They are tremendously important because they are one thousand years older than the Masoretic manuscripts of the tenth century AD. "Before 1947, the Hebrew text was based on three partial and one complete manuscript dating from about A.D. 1000. Now, thousands of fragments are available, as well as complete books, containing large sections of the Old Testament from one millennium before the time of the Masoretic manuscripts." (Geisler and Nix). I have a number of books on textual criticism in my library which were published prior to 1947. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls has meant that some chapters are now wholly out-dated. Truly, nothing ever stands still!

The Scrolls continue to interest all genuine Biblical students and there is no let up on the books, periodicals and articles that feature them. Exhibitions of the Scrolls still attract large numbers of people, and I saw this for myself a few years ago in Glasgow, Scotland. The accompanying booklet on the Scrolls was rightly headed up: "*Treasures in the Judean Desert*".

(A brother in Nigeria seeks the following: E.M. Zerr's Commentary Volume 4 [Jeremiah to Malachi] and Adam Clarke's Commentary Volume 5 [Matthew to Romans]. If any reader has a spare copy of either or both then please contact: Ian S. Davidson, 21 Glen Lyon, St Leonards, East Kilbride, Glasgow, G74 2JJ. Telephone: 01355 223370. E-mail: ian.sdavidson@tiscali.co.uk.)

News and Information

Ghana Appeal

The work of healing, both spiritually and physically, is continuing in Ghana and we thank donors for making this possible. You have helped our brethren to spread the word further and saved lives through medical assistance.

Whilst many of us do not experience suffering for our faith, others do. Because she accepted Christ in baptism a twenty-two year old student has been put out of the family home. Not only has she lost all that family life means, but she is homeless, destitute, and of course her studies have come to an end. Although she has been given shelter in a friend's home, this is a stressful situation and her health has deteriorated with pain in her joints. Can we help this sister who has suffered so much for her faith in the short time since becoming a child of God.

Rain in Ghana is extremely heavy and, amongst other needs, the roof of a church meeting place is in serious need of repair.

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**

Baptism

Glenrothes, Scotland

It is with great joy that we report the baptism on Saturday 14th June 2003 of

our new brother and sister in Christ, Steven and Dawn Aitken. Please keep these new Christians in your prayers as they grow in the Lord. To God be the glory.

Richard Gilmour

Coming Events

Stretford, Manchester Gospel Meetings

**Saturday, 20th September 2003
at 7.00pm**

Speaker:

Ernest Makin, Wigan

**Saturday, 25th October 2003
at 7.00 pm**

Speaker:

John Morgan, Hindley

**Saturday, 22nd November 2003
at 7.00 pm**

Speaker:

Vince O'Donovan, Brandon

There will be refreshments and discussion at 8.00 pm on each of the above occasions.

Ernest Makin and Vince O'Donovan will also speak on following Lord's Days, 21st September and 23rd November respectively at 11.00 am.

A warm welcome is extended to all

Newtongrange, Scotland

Social to be held on **Saturday, 4th October 2003 at 4.00 pm**. A warm welcome is extended to all. The speaker will be announced at a later date.

Glenrothes, Scotland

Gospel meeting on **Saturday, 13th September 2003** with Russell Hill, Morley as speaker.

Kentishtown, London

132nd Anniversary meetings will be held on **Saturday 4th October 2003** when Ian Davidson, Motherwell will speak at 3.00pm and 6.00pm. We would appreciate your support at these meetings.

Ian will also speak at our services at 11 am and 6.30 pm on **Sunday, 5th October**.

Longshoot, Wigan

May 2004

Bi-annual Fellowship Weekend is to be held over weekend of **Friday, April 30th to Monday, May 3rd 2004**. A full programme of events will be announced in due course. But you can be assured of a weekend of excellent teaching and fellowship.

Articles Invited

One of the historical strengths of the Scripture Standard has been the variety of articles that have been submitted for publication and it is a tradition that I am keen to continue.

Whilst I am delighted that a number of brothers have kindly agreed to submit articles on certain subjects, there is nothing better than to receive the unexpected article or Church report.

I am sure that many of you have thoughts that could easily be put down on paper for the benefit for the readership as a whole. If you find that impossible yourself encourage others to write. If you've heard a really good sermon, persuade the preacher to submit it as an article. Articles from sisters are welcomed.

I have no wish to 'control' the content so get busy! As a rule of thumb, 600 words fill one page, 1200 two pages etc. Would all correspondents please note that articles/reports submitted by email in Microsoft Word format make life so much easier. My email address is bob.rock@virgin.net Thank you in anticipation.

Robert

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