

The SCRIPTURE STANDARD

Vol. 74 No. 1

January, 2007

"Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us looking unto Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith"

CHANGES TO THE SCRIPTURE STANDARD

We wish to announce our plans for the future of the Scripture Standard. It has been as disappointing to the production/editorial team, as it has doubtless been to you the readers that we have fallen behind with the monthly issues of the magazine. We do not see the possibility of publishing 12 new issues for 2007 (in addition to the two outstanding for 2006 that have been produced in January/February 2007), within the year, and so are proposing only ten issues for **this year and subsequent years**. This is the January Issue and our intention is to omit the February and March issues and to have the April issue with you before the end of that month. In future years we will omit the July and August issues during the holiday period.

The result of this is to reduce the cost of the Scripture Standard to £7.50 per year. Those who have already paid at the old rate will have a credit towards 2008. I will be writing to each congregation to clarify the situation regarding their subscription.

Our thanks go to all those who have made our task easier by writing and contributing articles. We have a number of regular writers whose articles keep the Scripture Standard in print but we also need a regular supply of articles to supplement these and broaden the appeal of the magazine. One of the strengths of the SS over its history has been the willingness of its readership to support the magazine with content – and it is that content that gives the magazine its variety and vibrancy. Without brethren prepared to write there can be no magazine so we appeal to you to put pen to paper and serve our readers. Incidentally articles are equally welcome whether hand-written, typed or by email.

We very much appreciate your patience and support this past year and hope to provide a better service in the future. May God bless our work for Him.

John Kneller.

Contents: 1 - Reorganisation; **2** - Editorial; **4** - Genesis; **6** - Question Box; **9** - Understanding the Seasons of Life; **13** - Prophecy; **15** - News & Info.

Editorial

The curse of denominationalism

What is a denomination? According to Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary the definition is this: 'The act of naming: a name or title: a collection of individuals called by the same name: a sect.' So to denominate something is to give it a name, and presumably we give names to people, organizations and the like to give them an identity and a distinctiveness from other

people and organizations. It is one of the great ironies that the gospel that Jesus taught had, as one of its central themes, the eradication of all barriers and identities so that 'all may become one in Christ Jesus', yet has ostensibly become the cause of a proliferation of religious identities that have, over the ages, been the source of enormous conflict and confusion.

During this article (and some subsequent ones), I am going to attempt to pick my way through some of the issues that are raised by 'denominationalism' in so far as it impinges on what for now I will call our 'religious identity' as New Testament Christians. But just to put a little bit of context into the task of simplifying what our identity is, it is staggering and indeed frightening to find that if you type the word 'Christianity' into the Google internet search engine it will produce a response of 50.6 million possible reference sites, all of which will have something to say about, or some angle on, Christianity. One could only ever scratch the surface of the mass of reference material, exegesis, commentary and opinion that is available. One Lord, one Church, one baptism – and, as it sometimes seems, 50 million opinions as to what it all means!

It has also been traditional in Christian circles to refer to the '400 or so' currently identifiable denominations that continue in the present day. Inevitably this is fertile ground for those who want to undermine both God and the scriptures because if there is only one 'truth' it is valid to ask how so many variations of that truth have emerged. Whenever we broach this subject we must keep one fact absolutely clear. Men did not establish 'the Church'. God did. And God did not establish an 'organisation', but he called people out and added them to his number of called out people. That's what 'the Church' is – the called out people of God and we should never forget that. And it is one of the tragedies of denominationalism that the need to preserve a distinctive identity leads to an emphasis on those things that divide from others in preference to those that unite.

It is exceptionally difficult to refer to our own Christian identity without making the term 'Church (or Churches) of Christ' into a denominational tag. How do we respond to the question: 'What church do you belong to?' Many of us will say: 'I belong to, or am a member of, the Church of Christ', (we might add the 'name' of the local assembly that we meet with) but use that as a means of defining our 'belonging' in contrast to the Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, United Reform or other such denominational grouping, when surely a more accurate response is that we belong to the Lord's Church - provided that we use the phrase 'Lord's Church' in a non-denominational sense. After all it was to the Lord's Church that we were added upon our repentance and baptism. And I think that there is the nub of the denominationalism issue. The phrase 'the Lord's Church' is just too broad for many people; it isn't selective enough; doesn't have enough definition. And there are so many people who consider themselves to be members of the 'Lord's Church'.

I think we need to go back to the words of Jesus as we attempt to deal with some of the issues that arise from 'denominationalism'. The command that Jesus gave to his

disciples when he told them to preach the Gospel was to 'make disciples' of people (Matt 28:18-20); that is, to make people into disciples (followers) of Jesus, through baptism and teaching them commands of Jesus. How could the apostles achieve this and what tools did they have at their disposal to accomplish this task? They were not 'religious' experts or rabbis and nor were they people that had been brought up in traditional religious environments. They were common people who had themselves been called to become disciples of Christ. Jesus sent them out to make more disciples and the authority that they had came from the miraculous and compelling actions that they had seen Jesus perform, the words that they had heard Jesus speak about his nature and mission and most sensationally of all through the knowledge that they had, and which was to be further reinforced by the gift of the Holy Spirit, about the resurrection of Jesus. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, giving them recollection of, and insight into, the things that they had seen Jesus do and heard him say, they were to 'make disciples' of people. This mission started in earnest on the Day of Pentecost when, as Acts records, the universal Gospel was revealed when Peter said to those who enquired as to how they should be saved: **"Repent and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off, every one whom the Lord calls to him."** (Acts 2:38,39)

We seem, in the religious world, to have come a long, long way since the inception, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, of that simple but profound model for our addition by God into His Church. I can see no evidence of any other conditions that were laid upon those who responded to the gospel on the Day of Pentecost other than repentance and baptism in the name of Jesus. Some of those who were added at Pentecost will shortly afterwards have returned to their towns and villages and, at least initially, continued with many of their previous Jewish practices. Others no doubt lived and stayed in Jerusalem and met regularly and came under the teaching of the apostles. Certainly Acts 2:40 records that Peter 'testified with many other words' but I believe that it is wholly reasonable to speculate that the testimony that Peter gave would have been to the history, work and saving grace of the risen Christ and the inability of many Jews, particularly those influenced by the 'political hierarchy' to properly identify the one who had been sent amongst them as the long awaited and much-prophesied Messiah. I say that because the 'sermons' of the apostles that are recorded for us in Acts constantly take up that theme.

We know that on Pentecost, Jerusalem was thronged by Jews, particularly males, who had travelled long distances to be in Jerusalem for one of their major religious festivals. They had heard the 'Galilean' disciples, speaking about the mighty works of God in the disparate native languages of the hearers and had been amazed by it. They had heard Peter talk powerfully about the resurrection of Jesus, an event to which they (the disciples) were witnesses. And they had seen about 3000 respond to this gospel. The vast majority of respondents to Peter's 'sermon' would have been Jews, most of whom, at the end of the festival, would have left Jerusalem to return to their own homes in many countries no doubt reflecting on the 'perplexing' experiences of the previous few days. They went with no New Testament Bible, no written creed that set out the new belief system and no '5-step plan of salvation'. But they went with the knowledge that something unique and extraordinary had happened in Jerusalem, and had found something so compelling in the accounts of the disciples to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus that they were 'cut to the heart' and sought to know "What shall we do?" And in Jerusalem there was a palpable sense of awe at the words and works of the apostles.

(To be continued)

STUDIES IN GENESIS

(Ian S Davidson, Motherwell)



The book of Genesis is a wonderful book. I have read it through on numerous occasions. It is the foundation book of the whole Bible. Satan knows this and thus the constant attacks upon it. Destroy the book of Genesis and the whole structure will inevitably collapse.

The word *genesis* means "origin" and "the Book of Genesis gives the only true and reliable account of the origin of all the basic entities of the universe and of life" (Henry M. Morris). In

Genesis we read of the origin of the universe; the origin of order and complexity (hence cosmos not chaos); the origin of the solar system; the origin of the atmosphere and hydrosphere; the origin of life; the origin of man; the origin of marriage; the origin of evil; the origin of language; the origin of government; the origin of culture; the origin of nations; the origin of religion; and the origin of God's chosen people.

I believe that Genesis deals with true history and true science. To me, Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah and his family and Abraham and Sarah are as real as Anthony and Cleopatra, Peter and John, John Sneddon (my grandfather) and his family and R.B. Scott and his beloved wife, Mary. They were *all* real people, who lived in the real world, although they lived millennia apart. I concur with Alexander Campbell when he wrote: "The history of the Bible is the only authentic history in the world of almost half its existence."

The book of Genesis is quoted or referred to frequently throughout the rest of the Biblical text – at least 200 times in the case of the New Testament. The Bible would be quite a different book without Genesis! In addition to those already mentioned, the book features such great characters as Enoch, Methuselah, Lot, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, Esau, Rachel and Joseph and his brothers.

The longevity of those who lived prior to the flood is quite astonishing. (The antediluvian climate must have played its part.) The fascinating thing is that Adam lived long enough to have been able to converse even with Noah's father, Lamech. Lamech lived for 777 years; Noah, for 950 years; Methuselah, for 969 years (he died the year of the flood); Jared, for 962 years; Mahalaleel, for 895 years; Cainan, for 910 years; Enos, for 905 years; Seth, for 912; and Adam himself, for 930 years. We notice a change in the postdiluvian world. Shem died at 600; Arphaxad at 438; Salah at 433; Eber at 464; Peleg at 239; Reu at 239; Seug at 230; Nahor at 148; Terah at 205; Abraham at 175; Isaac at 180; and Jacob at 147. Genesis closes with the death of Joseph at the age of 110. Alexander Campbell once wrote: "We need no oracle to declare or to decide, that men walked by faith before philosophy, or that there was no place for speculation or hypothesis during the first two thousand years of time; for who could have been so crazy as to state a hypothesis about the origin or nature, the relations or obligations of man, or about the origin of the universe, while Adam lived! Or about the deluge or antediluvian state of our planet, while Noah, Shem or Japheth yet lived! Such a speculator would have been laughed out of society, and excommunicated from the habitations of the sane and rational of mankind."

Who wrote Genesis? I have always accepted the view that Genesis was written by Moses. I believe he also wrote the other four books of the Pentateuch. We read: **"And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, Jesus expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself...These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me"** (Luke 24:27, 44). Moses, of course, wrote the book under the inspiration of the Spirit. There is no doubt that writing was around in Moses' day. Professors Alan Millard and Kenneth Kitchen (both formerly of Liverpool

University) have shown clearly that this is the case. (Incidentally, I was pleased to meet Professor Millard in Manchester last year and discuss this very subject with him.)

Genesis is a large book. In fact, it is the fourth largest book in the Bible after the Psalms, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. But its size should not put us off. Henry Morris liked to study it in the order of its nine main subdivisions:

- 1) "The generations of the heavens and the earth" (1:1 – 2:4);
- 2) "The book of the generations of Adam" (2:4b – 5:1);
- 3) "The generations of Noah" (Genesis 5:1b – 6:9);
- 4) "The generations of the sons of Noah" (6:9b – 10:1);
- 5) " The generations of Shem" (10:1b – 11:10);
- 6) " The generations of Terah" (11:10b – 11:27);
- 7) " The generations of Isaac" (11:27b – 25:19);
- 8) " The generations of Jacob" (Genesis 25:19b – 37:2);
- 9) " The generations of the Sons of Jacob" (37:2b – Exodus 1:1).

Many comparisons can be made between the book of Genesis and the book of Revelation. For example:

- "darkness"(Genesis 1:4) and "no night there" (Revelation 21:25);
- "the seas" (1:10) and "no more sea" (21:1);
- "the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night" (1:16) and "no need of the sun, neither of the moon" (21:23);
- "a river went out of Eden" (2:10) and "a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb" (22:1);
- "the gold of that land is good" (2:12) and "the street of the city was pure gold" (21:21);
- "the tree of life also in the midst of the garden" (2:9) and "in the midst of the street of it and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life" (22:2);
- "there is bdellium and the onyx stone" (2:12) and "the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones" (21:19);
- "and they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day" (3:8) and "He (God) will dwell with them" (21:3);
- "cursed is the ground for your sake" (3:17) and "there shall be no more curse" (22:3);
- "in sorrow you shall eat of it all the days of your life" (3:17) and "no more...sorrow" (21:4);
- "and you shall eat the herb of the field" (3:18) and the twelve manner of fruits" (22:1);
- "for you are dust, and unto dust you shall return" (3:19) and "there shall be no more death" (21:4);
- "evil continually" (6:5) and "there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defiles, neither whatsoever works abomination, or makes a lie" (21:27);
- "coats of skin" (3:21) and "clothed in fine linen, white and clean" (19:14);
- "the serpent beguiled me and I did eat" (3:13) and "the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone" (20:10);
- "a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life" (3:24) and "they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates of the city" (22:14).

Let me emphasize that the book of Genesis consists of a genuine and historical record. Meredith G. Kline in the introduction to his commentary on Genesis has written: "Decisively in favour of the judgment that Gen. chapters 1- 11 is not mythological but a genuine record of history is the testimony of the rest of the Bible. The material in these chapters is unquestionably interpreted by inspired writers elsewhere in the Scripture as historical in the same sense that they understand Gen. chapters 12-50 or Kings or the Gospels to be historical... Gen. chapters 1-50 is history throughout, and when the writing of history is informed by Divine inspiration the resultant product is fully trustworthy historical record, however remote in time the human historian may have been from the events recorded."



QUESTION:
What do 1 Cor 8 and Revelation 2:20
tell us about meat offered to idols?



This month's questions (2) come from the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, where, in a Bible Class studying 1st Corinthians", a problem arose concerning the eating of meat which had been offered to idols. It was noted that 1st Cor.8 says it is permissible, whilst Revelation ch.2:20 appears says that it is a sin.

Rev. 2:20 also mentions the woman named Jezebel, and the questioner would like to know who she was and why she is mentioned.

The Assertion of Christian Liberty

Let us begin with 1st Cor.8, where the theme of the chapter is Christian liberty. In this chapter Paul enunciates the principle that, although in Christ we have freedom, there may arise situations in which the mature believer will forego the exercise of his liberty in order to avoid harming a weaker brother.

The Corinthian Problem.

Consider the situation that the Christians in Corinth found themselves having to face, in a city where paganism and idol worship were strongly rooted and where the offering of animal sacrifices to false gods in pagan temples was an every-day occurrence. The presentation of such sacrifices followed a set ritual.

Not the entire sacrificial animal was burnt on the altar. The priests who received the proffered animal first set aside a part of the flesh to be offered on the altar. A second part of the animal was set aside for the use of the priests themselves. Then, the rest of the carcase was returned to the worshipper, in order that he might hold a feast with his relatives and friends. Such feasts were often held in the courts of the Temple itself.

Meat from the Pagan Temple.

The Christian could come into contact with meat that had been offered in a pagan Temple in either of two ways:

1. He might be invited to a meal at which he was offered meat that had been presented as a sacrifice to an idol.
2. Or, he might himself have bought such meat in the 'Shambles' (the meat market).

It is not difficult to understand that the number of animal sacrifices with which the pagan priests had to deal, meant that their 'portion' was far greater than they could possibly use themselves, and they therefore disposed of it in the meat-market.

Since no superstitious pagan would ever consider buying meat that had been offered to a 'god', the flesh was offered for sale very cheaply, and was, therefore, a bargain of which some Christians happily took advantage, because they knew, as Paul states, that '*an idol is nothing*'.

But, as the apostle also points out, not all Corinthian Christians possessed this 'understanding'. Some of them had been brought up in paganism, and, although they had come to believe in Christ, they found it difficult to adopt an enlightened, relaxed

attitude towards the eating of meat which had idolatrous associations. They still had a lingering feeling of unease concerning this practice, and, if they were to follow the example of their 'stronger' brethren, as Paul states, *'their weak conscience would be defiled'*.

He states that 'stronger' brethren know that *'an idol is nothing'*, and that meat offered to an idol is, after all, merely meat, and therefore the Christians of Corinth were at liberty to eat such meat. But - and here we encounter a principle which is no less true today - if they were to exercise their Christian liberty in a Christ-like manner and demonstrate love for their 'weaker' brethren, they must abstain from such meat, in order not to harm a weaker brother *'for whom Christ died'*.

In other words, Paul contended that the exercise of our Christian liberty should sometimes be suspended, if, to insist on our 'rights' would result in damage to the faith of a less-mature brother.

I think we should notice, however, that Paul never hesitated to describe a brother as a *'weaker'* brother, if that is what he was! He would never lead a one-eyed man to believe that he could see as well as a man with two eyes! And, certainly, we are always willing to make allowances for the baby of the family.

But the baby must not remain a baby for ever, neither must the weaker brother remain weak. Both must grow. The tragedy is, however, that the 'weaker brother' very often regards himself as the strong one!

QUESTION:

Who was Jezebel and why is she mentioned in
Revelation Chapter 2

Jezebel in the Old Testament.

Turning to the second question concerning 'Jezebel', who is mentioned in the letter to the Church in Thyatira, found, in Rev.2, let me first refresh your memory concerning this Old Testament character.

Jezebel was the daughter of the King of the Zidonians who became the wife of Ahab, the spineless king of Israel. She was the woman who, because of her husband's moral and spiritual weakness, was able to introduce the idolatrous religion of her own people into Israel, and encountered, as a result, the vigorous opposition of the prophet Elijah.

The total number of prophets of Baal mentioned in 1st Kings 18:19, reveals the considerable extent to which she had succeeded in her purpose, and the tactic she used to persuade the people of Israel to accept Baalism was extremely cunning.

Jezebel suggested to the Israelites that there was no need for them to reject the worship of YHWH, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, their traditional God, nor was she asking them to do so, because, she argued, the two religions could exist side by side. Indeed, they would complement each other in a symbiotic relationship!

The people could continue to be obedient to the Mosaic Law, and, at the same time, enjoy the liberty of conduct which the religion of Zidon offered - liberty which permitted its followers to indulge in sexual activity as a so-called 'act of worship', after they had offered sacrifices to 'The Baal' - ('The Owner' or 'Possessor').

In this cunning way, she led Israel into sin. To read about her ignominious – not to say gruesome – end, you should turn to 2nd Kings 9:30-37.

The New Testament ‘Jezebel’

The use of this woman’s name in Rev. 2:20 plainly recalls this piece of Old Testament history and suggests that the woman, who was exercising such an evil influence in the Church at Thyatira, was a woman of similar character.

This similarity becomes all the more striking when we learn that, whilst our English translations give us, *‘You tolerate **that woman Jezebel**’*, some of the ancient Greek manuscripts state, *‘You tolerate **your wife, Jezebel**’*, words that Elijah may well have spoken to King Ahab!

What was she doing?

She was ‘seducing’ some of God’s People into practicing idolatrous worship, as did Jezebel of old.

How did she do this?

I suggest that the same chapter offers us an explanation – (Rev. 2; 14), - where we find the false prophet Balaam is mentioned. Notice that the *‘doctrine of Balaam’* led the Israelites to do exactly what the Thyatiran Jezebel ‘seduced’ believers at Thyatira into doing; namely, into *‘committing fornication, and eating things offered to idols’*.

Balaam’s False Doctrine

In Balaam’s case, having tried several times to inflict a curse on the Israelites - and failing! – he resorted to a different strategy. He told them that, because they were the ‘covenant people of God’, enjoying a special relationship with God, no-one, and nothing they could ever do, could harm them. Therefore they could join in the pagan worship and activity of the Moabites with affecting their relationship with the God of Israel. After all: *‘Once in grace, always in grace! Once saved, always saved! Once a child of God, always a child of God!’* (Does this sound familiar?) And thus Balaam taught Israel to sin.

We should bear in mind that Pagan worship imposed no code of morality, and worshippers were actually encouraged to indulge in sexual activity as an ‘act of worship’. They were taught that when they did so, they were merely copying the example of the Baal and his Consort, who by their own act of sexual union, caused the ground to become fertile.

Similarly, at Thyatira, the eating of *‘things sacrifice to idols’* was sinful because it was an act of idolatrous worship, as was the act of immorality that ‘Jezebel’ also encouraged.

Conclusion.

The difference between the eating of *‘meat which had been offered to idols’* which Paul mentioned in 1st Cor. 8, and the eating of *‘things sacrificed to idols’* referred to in Rev.2, is that the first instance amounted to a Christian display of contempt for the idol and its sacrifices, but in the second instance, it became a sinful act of idolatry.

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Understanding the Seasons of Life

Lesson 5 - The Season of Parenting

(David Yasko, USA)

This month we look at the season of **parenting**. We may not think of parenting as being a season of life but it is - because we aren't going to have our children at home forever. Isn't it amazing how quickly our children grow up? We all want to be good parents. We want to have strong, healthy, functional families. But the fact is we live life at a breakneck pace and the constant pressure of our careers puts our families at risk. Can we be successful at building a career and a family at the same time? We are going to look at seven things our children need most from us. These needs are from the greatest book ever written on parenting, God's word, the Bible. These seven things are what God does to us, his children, as our heavenly Father. And he wants us to do them to the people in our life.

1. CHILDREN NEED COMPASSION.

Our children need unconditional, unbelievable love. They need a place where they are accepted, warts and all. Compassion is simply a combination of love and understanding. Compassion is when I know everything about you, and I still like you. 1 John 4:7: **"Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God."** Another version says, "Practise loving each other." Love is not a natural thing. We have to learn it and we learn it by practising and what better place to practise love than at home with the people we are forced to live with for a time. If we can learn to love our families, we can learn to love anybody. How come? Because we aren't in close contact with anybody else as much as we are with our families. It's easy to love at a distance. It's when we're with people all the time that we don't always get along. There are three ways to express compassionate love to our children:

- **AFFECTION** That's just picking them up and hugging them. A lot.
- **AFFIRMATION** That means they need to hear it from us. We need to tell our kids more than once a day, "I love you." That builds them up.
- **ATTENTION** One of the greatest gifts we can give somebody is to listen to him/her. When we get down on our knees and look at that kid eyeball to eyeball, we are saying: "You matter to me."

Our children need our love and we all know that. But there is a myth out there that says, "all you need is love" and that's just not true. I could give you thousands of examples that simply loving our children is not enough to keep them growing physically, emotionally, spiritually and mentally. We need six other elements.

2. CHILDREN NEED COUNSEL.

Our children need wisdom, advice and direction. Study after study has shown that the common denominator behind successful adults was a stable value system as children. A stable value system is good counsel. Those people who grow up understanding right and wrong are the ones that make it in this world. Children that don't, flame out. We all need a good foundation. We all need boundaries. Those statistics put away the theory: "Well, it doesn't matter what you believe as long as you're sincere." It does matter what you believe. Some value systems teach you to love your enemies. Some value systems teach you to eat your enemies. Is there a difference there? You bet. And we owe it to our

children to teach them right from wrong. Our children are crying out for counsel. So what do we do? Deuteronomy 6:7: **"You must teach these commandments to your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, before you go to bed and when you get up."** I want you to notice four things about this verse.

1. **You** must teach these commandments.

Who's the "you"? Well, God's not talking about the government, or the school, or even the church. He's talking about parents. It is the parent's duty to teach moral values to our children. Today in America we act like we're expecting the government or the school or the Church to take over the raising of our kids, and we shouldn't be surprised they're not doing a good job. The Bible says it's the parent's job.

2. You **must** teach these commandments.

It's not optional. In fact, if I'm not doing this, I'm not being a very good parent. If I'm depending on the school or the church to do my job, no matter how good they may be, I'm slacking off.

3. Notice **where** you are to teach.

At home, when we're playing outside, at bedtime, when we get up. In other words, all the time. If we are parents, we are always teaching. We are always teaching something. Even if we're just sitting there watching TV, we're always teaching something.

4. Notice **what** you are to teach.

Commandments. God didn't call them 10 suggestions. He called them 10 commandments. It wasn't a matter of "think about this stuff." It was a matter of, "do this stuff."

We, as a nation, are reaping what we have sown. The long and short of it is that children spend more time to day with a passive baby sitter like the TV than they do with their parents. Cornell University miked and recorded 1000 fathers to tape and timed their interaction with their children. The survey ran for 8 weeks. The results showed that those men, on average, spent 37 seconds a day in communication with their children. God gave us our children and when we blow it here, in parenting, we have blown it in the major responsibility area of our lives.

3. CHILDREN NEED CORRECTION.

Children make mistakes. Nobody has a perfect child. Our children all need discipline, accountability and training. Hebrews 12:6: **"The Lord disciplines those he loves."** If we love somebody we are going to care enough to correct him or her. Proverbs 19:18: **"Discipline your children, for in that there is hope; do not be a willing party to their death."** Now, this is important. God says to us "if I don't discipline my children, I'm setting them up for failure." Why? Because they will develop habits that will tear them down. The Bible gives us guidelines for discipline. It says, when you correct, you should do it: 1) Quickly. 2) Calmly. 3) Sparingly.

We need to understand the difference between punishment and discipline. Our command is to treat our children the way God treated us. When Jesus died on the cross, he was punished. Jesus took the punishment once and for all. So God doesn't punish us, but he

does discipline us. The purpose of punishment is to inflict penalty. The purpose of discipline is to promote growth. With punishment, the focus is on the past, anger and what you've done wrong. With discipline, the focus is on the future, love and how to keep from messing up again. When we correct in anger it always produces resentment. You talk to the children of an angry parent and see how resentful they are. So correct looking to the future, not looking to the past. It's the difference between redemption and destruction. The key to finding the difference between punishment and discipline has to be our attitude. What's our motive? If we take it out on our children when we've had a bad day, we're wrong. Or as God's Word says: Ephesians 4:29: **"Don't use harmful words that tear down, use helpful words that build up."** That just means to learn to correct without condemning, and produce discipline without destroying.

4. CHILDREN NEED CONFIDENCE.

You wouldn't want to be a child growing up today. Life is a lot tougher for our children today than it was for us. There is more pressure, pace, stress, and different values. And it seems the battle for self worth is huge. In the State of California, they tested a bunch of 3rd graders on their self-esteem. They found that 85% of them felt good about themselves. By Intermediate School, the figure had dropped to 55% having good self-esteem. By Graduation, only 5% were able to say they felt adequate. This is saying that the older our children get, the worse they feel about themselves. And it's because we are living in a society that is constantly tearing things down. Look at our newspapers - is the majority of it positive or negative? Our destructive society is threatening the very future of our nation. And with the world as negative as it is, the last thing our children need when they come home is more negativity. Colossians 3:21: **"Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged and quit trying."**

Are you a parent that is impossible to please? Isn't it easy to see our children's negative characteristics? So what are we looking at? If they get C's you want B's. If they get B's you want A's. If they get A's you want straight A's. The Bible tells us we can put so much pressure on our children that they just give up. So how do we instill confidence in our children? Look at this: 1 Corinthians 13:7: **"If you love someone, you will always believe in him, always expect the best of him, and always stand your ground in defending him."** If we want to raise confident children, we've got to build them up more than we tear them down. Sometimes, in our own wisdom, we try to balance out the positive and the negative. You know, give them equal parts praise (to keep them moving) and equal parts reality (another word for negative words so they don't become big-headed). It doesn't work like that. In fact, we need to be giving about 10 positive's to every negative. Why? Because the negative is what we remember. If I get ten cards telling me "good job", and one telling me "you stink" guess which one stays in my mind? It's just human nature. Every time we give a negative we need to give about 10 positives to balance it out because they are not equal. Overemphasize the positive because it is inevitable we will have to do the negative and every child needs to know somebody in their corner, who'll cheer them on.

5. CHILDREN NEED CELEBRATION.

Which is a big word for fun. Some of my best memories with my son James were when I would get him out of school and we'd go to the game room at the shopping centre. Or when we'd pile in the car for a Hockey Game or go watch professional wrestling and scream ourselves hoarse. We desperately need fun in our homes. I know a lot of people who are good parents, but they just need to chill out every now and then. Have some fun. Now, the biggest obstacle to 'chilling out' is that we're just too busy. We bring our work home because it can't wait and if we don't do the work, it will show the company we aren't committed. And we just don't have time for fun. And instead of enjoying our

children, we endure them. Children need fun. Ecclesiastes 11:8: **“Let us enjoy every day of life, no matter how long we live.”** If there is no celebration in your house, don’t be surprised if your children don’t want to be there and don’t be surprised if, when they move off, they don’t want to come back to see you.

6. CHILDREN NEED CHALLENGES.

One of our greatest life skills that we have to learn is “how to be responsible.” How can we teach responsibility to our children? There’s only one way. Give them responsibility. Nothing develops our children faster than trusting them with responsibility. Will they mess up? Did you? Will they sometimes be irresponsible? Were you? We only hurt our children when we withhold responsibility from them. The correct order of life is like this: When they’re born they’re under our control. When they get ready to move out they learn self-control. And when they consider their lives, they are under God’s control. From parent control, to self-control, to God control. That means, you have to give up control. When we take responsibility for our children, we take it away from them. When we refuse to let our children grow up, we fill the world with another co dependent person. I think that, with hindsight being 20/20, if I had the last 20 years to do all over again, I would have done less for my son and taught him to do more for himself. Luke 16:10: **“Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much.”** Children respond to responsibility.

7. CHILDREN NEED CONSISTENCY.

Specifically, they need consistency from us. They need to know how we’re going to respond. You want to mess up a child? Be a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde parent. Well, how do we become consistent as parents? Model our heavenly father. Psalm 145:13: **“The LORD is faithful to all his promises and fair toward all he has made.”** You want to know what consistency is all about. Just note those words - faithful and fair. They sum up consistency. As parents God expects us to be faithful to our promises and fair in our decisions. Inconsistency not only gives us insecure children, it gives us bitter children. In fact, broken promises are the greatest creator of bitterness. There are no perfect parents or families because there are no perfect people. You were raised by imperfect parents, and your parents were raised by imperfect parents. And that’s why I’m so glad God loves to use imperfect people to get his job done. What I want you to do, if you are in this season, is not to make your goal to be a perfect family. You’ll fail. It’s to make our goal to be healthy families. Now, how do we do that? Look at Proverbs 24:3: **“By wisdom a house is built, and through understanding it is strong.”** We get healthy families by cramming ourselves full of wisdom. You see, we go into a season as novices. What prepared you for parenting? Nothing could prepare us for parenting. I know it sounds kind of backwards, but I know a whole lot more about parenting now that James is gone, than I did before he came into this world. Where was this wisdom when he was five? But while he was growing, so were we. And the more we got into God’s word, the more parenting made sense. In this season, your children are God’s will for your life.

Let me close with some thoughts for young people. Your parents aren’t perfect. When you grow up, you aren’t going to be a perfect parent either. But they are God’s will for your life. God chose them to bring you into this world and so you might want to consider what your attitude should be towards God’s chosen people. And, let me take this opportunity to talk to those who are children of ageing parents. You are finding yourselves going into the re-parenting season. You’re parenting your parents. I want to promise you the Bible says that God will bless your life, if you honor your father and your mother. Rate yourself on these seven points.

Prophets and Prophecy

Introduction

This article will examine the role of the prophets during the time of the Old Testament. (We will be looking at the role of prophets in the early Church in a separate article.) What was God's purpose in sending the prophets? What was a prophet and how did God communicate through a prophet? How could people distinguish between a true prophet and a false prophet? These are just a few of the questions that this article will attempt to answer.

What was a prophet?

Many people today believe that a prophet was like a fortune-teller, but this was very far from the case. God specifically condemned such practices: "Do not practise divination or sorcery," (Leviticus 19:26). Divination was the pagan practice of foreseeing the future or foretelling future events. Various means were used: reading omens, dreams, the use of the lot, astrology, necromancy and others. The Israelites fell into this sin and were condemned for it. 2 Kings 17 explains why the Northern Kingdom of Israel was exiled and one of the reasons was divination. "They practised divination and sorcery and sold themselves to do evil in the eyes of the Lord, provoking him to anger, (v.17).

So what was a prophet and how was he different from a diviner? The Bible itself defines a prophet. When God commissioned Moses to go back to Egypt and help free the Israelites, Moses complained that he was not an articulate speaker (Exodus 4:10). So God told him that Aaron, his brother, could speak for him. In Exodus 4:15 – 16 God explained how this was going to work: "You shall speak to him and put words in his mouth, and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth and will teach you both what to do. He shall speak for you to the people, and he shall be your mouth and you shall be as God to him." Basically Aaron was going to be Moses' spokesman and God was going to make sure that the message was going to be correctly delivered. So how does this passage define what a prophet was? Exodus 7:1 – 2 holds the answer: "And the Lord said to Moses, "See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet. You shall speak all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall tell Pharaoh to let the people of Israel go out of his land."" So a prophet was a person who received a message directly from God and delivered it to the people God had directed it to. This is what the prophets claimed. In their books, the prophets used phrases such as: "Thus says the Lord," or, "The word of the Lord came." They did not resort to reading signs, dreams or omens as the diviners did. A prophet was God's spokesman.

Becoming a Prophet

I doubt very much that those who became prophets chose that as a profession. So how did they become prophets? The simple answer is that God chose and commissioned them. Sometimes he commissioned them in spectacular ways. Isaiah and Ezekiel had dramatic visions of God when they were called, (Isaiah 6; Ezekiel 1). Jeremiah simply records that the "word of the Lord" came to him (Jeremiah 1:4). Amos records: "I was neither a prophet nor a prophet's son, but I was a shepherd, and I also took care of sycamore-fig trees. But the Lord took me from tending the flock and said to me, "Go, prophesy to my people Israel," (Amos 7:14 – 15). Elijah

began his prophetic career by announcing to King Ahab that there will be a drought (1 Kings 17:1; James 5:17 - 18). However God chose those who were already serving him as prophets; Elijah said that he already served the Lord God of Israel (1 Kings 17:1). So God chose these faithful men for a role.

The Role of a Prophet

Why did God send prophets to His people? His people started off with great promise after they left Egypt and conquered Canaan. However they soon went back to their old ways of idolatry. So God chose those who were faithful to him to carry His message to the people in order to try to bring them back to him. 2 Chronicles 36:15 - 16 explains what God tried to do through his prophets: "The Lord, the God of their fathers sent word to them through his messengers again and again, because he had pity (compassion) on his people and on his dwelling-place. But they mocked God's messengers, despised his words and scoffed at his prophets until the wrath of the Lord was aroused against his people and there was no remedy." Nehemiah says that God was patient with them (Nehemiah 9:30). So a prophet was God's messenger, or, spokesman, who carried God's message to his people in order to restore his people. Prophets were sent to the kings of Israel and Judah (1 Kings 17:1; Jeremiah 17); to the priests (Amos 7:10 - 17); to the people (Jeremiah 7) and to foreign nations (Jonah). He carried the message of God wherever he went and in whatever situation God put him.

Receiving God's message

How did a prophet receive God's message? Hebrews 1:1 tells us: "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways." If we accept on face value what this verse is saying, then it is saying that God SPOKE THROUGH the prophets. Nehemiah, in his prayer, said: "By your SPIRIT you admonished them through your prophets," (Nehemiah 9:30). Peter, in the New Testament agreed with Nehemiah when he wrote: "For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as THEY WERE CARRIED ALONG BY THE HOLY SPIRIT," (2 Peter 1:21). So it was through the Holy Spirit that they received God's messages. Jesus himself certainly taught that God spoke through the prophets. Matthew records Jesus as saying: "How is it then that David, SPEAKING BY THE SPIRIT, calls him (Jesus) Lord? (Matthew 22:43) The prophets themselves record clearly that the word of the Lord CAME TO THEM and you can check that for yourself by using a concordance, or, by reading their books.

The way they received God's message differed. Isaiah records that he had visions (Isaiah 1:1). Daniel had disturbing dreams and visions (Daniel 9). Jeremiah tried not to speak God's words on occasions, but when he tried he said, "But if I say, "I will not mention him or speak any more in his name, his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed I cannot," (Jeremiah 20:9). So each prophet had a different experience when they received God's word. However all of the prophets claimed that they had direct communication with God when they received God's messages.

Testing Prophets

How could people know whether what a prophet said was true or false? There are two tests mentioned in the Old Testament. One of them is recorded in Deuteronomy

18:20 – 22: “But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything that I have not commanded him to say, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, must be put to death. You may say to yourselves, “How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the Lord?” If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the Lord does not take place or come true, that is a message the Lord has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him.” Of course this was sound common sense. But things were not quite so simple as Deuteronomy 13:1 – 3 indicates: “If a prophet, or one who foretells dreams, appears among you and announces to you a miraculous sign or wonder, and if the sign or wonder of which he has spoken takes place, and he says, “Let us follow other gods” (gods you have not known) and let us worship them, you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer. The Lord your God is testing you to find out whether you love him with all your heart and with all your soul.” The test was: was the message the prophet was bringing consistent with what God has already revealed. Had the prophet taken upon himself the mantle of being a prophet, or, had God really chosen him. This problem plagued Israel for the rest of her history, (see Jeremiah 23:33 – 40; 28 as examples).

Conclusion

The prophets were God’s messengers to his people. They were responsible for delivering his messages to them because God, through his Spirit, gave them his word. God chose those who were faithful to him to be his prophets. False prophets took on the office by themselves and presumed to speak in God’s name. A prophecy was tested by outcome and by what the message itself revealed.

In the next article we will be looking at the Nature of prophecy.

Stephen Woodcock (stephen.woodcock@hotmail.co.uk)

News and Information

Ghana Appeal

Donations have not only enabled brethren to receive urgent medical attention, but have also strengthened the Church in various ways and we continue to receive letters of thanks and appreciation.

The bicycle we purchased is enabling a brother to travel considerable distances to evangelise and strengthen existing churches.

Another brother has recently converted and baptised five men and four women

from other religious backgrounds, including Muslim, Roman Catholic, Presbyterian and Methodist. Other brethren have asked that he be helped to travel to Togo to increase and strengthen the Church there before returning to Ghana.

Although limitation of funds now prevents us from commencing the building of new meeting places, we are helping one congregation to complete theirs.

Those wishing to help in this work please make cheques payable to Dennyloanhead Church of Christ Ghana Fund and send to treasurer:

**Mrs. Janet Macdonald,
12 Charles Drive, Larbert, Falkirk,
Stirlingshire. FK5 3HB
Tel: 01324 562480**

Coming Events

Saturday Evening Meetings at Stretford.

To be held in the Green Hut,
538 Kings Road, Stretford, Manchester.
Each meeting will start at 7.00 pm and
will consist of:

A Gospel Topic, followed by
Light refreshments, concluding with
Open Discussion.

Dates and speakers:

21st April 2007
John Morgan, Hindley
22nd September 2007
Mark Hill, Loughborough
20th October 2007
Ernest Makin, Wigan.

EUROPEAN CHRISTIAN WORKSHOP

**Thursday 30th August to Saturday
1st September 2007**

We are pleased to announce that we
will be holding our Second European
Christian Workshop at Lancaster
University.

The Theme will be:
Growing Strong Hearts
And
Strong Churches

Last year we had 53 people from 11
countries and they enjoyed the
experience.

DON'T MISS OUT!!

The speakers that have been
confirmed so far are:

John Mooney (UK),
Vince O'Donovan (UK),
Jason Sneathen (UK),
Alexander Malirrytos (Greece),
Randy Lowery (USA),
Terry Briley (USA).

We are also planning to hold
Ladies' Classes as well.

**Early Bird Offer: The fee will be
£95 if you book before 30th April.**
After this the fee will be £105.

If you want further information then
please contact:
Stephen Woodcock – (01942) 211479
Or E-mail:
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