

# Temptation & Fruit

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**E**VERY CHRISTIAN is tempted to sin. If we are not tempted by Satan then we are probably not serving the Lord. Even when we may be mature Christians we will still be tempted to sin. We will never 'outgrow' temptation. Paul said "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man"[1 Cor 10:13].

Even Jesus was tempted to sin. Temptation is actually an opportunity to bear fruit for Jesus. Bearing fruit is one of God's greatest desires for us. Jesus said His Father prunes every branch that does not bear fruit in order that "it may bear **more fruit**" [John 15:2]. He further said "By this is My Father glorified, that you bear **much fruit** and so prove to be My disciples" [John 15:8 ESV]. Jesus also said Paul's prayer for the Colossians was that they would be fully pleasing to the Lord "being **fruitful** in every good work" [Col 1:10]. So bringing forth fruit in our lives ought to be a priority for Christians.

## A PROCESS

Temptation is a process. It has a predictable cycle with the sole object of getting the Christian to sin. We see this process in the very first sin. Eve **saw** the fruit, then she **desired** the fruit, then she **took** the fruit.

*"When the woman **saw** that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree **desirable** to make one wise, she **took** of its fruit and ate" [Gen 3:6]. Similarly we read about Achan's temptation into sin "When I **saw** among the spoils a beautiful Babylonian garment... I **coveted** them and **took** them" [Joshua 7:21].*

The Apostle James describes the same process "each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own **desires** and enticed. Then when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and sin when it is full-grown, brings forth death" [James 1:14,15]. Sin is a process that eventually leads to death - unless repented of!

This means that we must be careful to avoid places where we know there will be temptation. We may in providence have to be where there is temptation, at work or some other legitimate place, but we must avoid unnecessary situations where we know we will be tempted to sin. Eve was near the tree when she was tempted to stretch out her hand. We must not use our Christian liberty as an excuse for being tempted. See [Gal 5:13 and 1 Peter 2:16].

We need to be careful what we watch on the television - we need to use the 'Off' button and avoid

unnecessarily 'flicking through the channels'. We could 'get caught'. The first step is seeing the temptation which leads to further steps.

The second step is when our **emotions** become involved. We not only see the temptation but we **desire** to have it - sometimes at all costs! It is one thing to appreciate beauty and function - it is another to lust after it. The Scriptures encourage us to appreciate whatever is good. *"Whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy - meditate on these things"* [Philippians 4:8]. But we are forbidden to give in to greed or lust.

Appreciation can proceed from admiring something, to the desire for the wrongful obtaining or abuse of it. Lust is a choice, a deliberate act of the will.

The final step in the process is to 'give-in' to the temptation. This is disobedience. When this happens, you are its slave. You are not a 'free' person. You are 'bound' by your lust - it controls you. *"Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that ones slaves to whom you obey"* [Romans 6:16]. And as Peter said to Simon the Sorcerer, *"you are bound by iniquity"* [Acts 8:23].

The only course after this has happened is repentance. If the repentance is genuine, it will be bitter but there is no other way.

## **OVERCOMING TEMPTATION**

We might think that temptation is something **outside** of ourselves - in the circumstances around us. But it is not. James tells us clearly *"each one of us is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed"* [James 1:14]. The problem is within us - in our hearts and minds.

We also need to remember that Satan **cannot force** us to sin - he only suggests and encourages us. We sin by choice. The act is our act and we must bear the consequences.

We must **not** start **debating** with the temptation. If we **reason** with it, if we 'take on' and challenge the temptation, we will likely fail. We must not 'entertain' the idea of how best to defeat it, for debating with temptation only strengthens the temptation.

Instead we must **dismiss** and **ignore** the idea of conquering the temptation by **diverting** our thoughts away from it. We must immediately **change** the thought and become **distracted**. We need to **refocus** on something completely different.

Paul said that temptation is common to Christians, but with every temptation there was *"a way to escape"* - ignoring, changing dismissing and replacing the thought, is that way of escape [1 Cor 10:13]. When we overcome temptation in this way, we bear much fruit and bring glory to God. We have resisted the devil. And every time we resist sin, we become stronger in faith.

# Whatever Happened to Sin?

By Ian Coffey, Senior Minister at Mutley Baptist Church, Plymouth. This article appeared in the April 2004 issue of 'Christianity+Renewal' and is printed with kind permission

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**S**HE IS A NORMAL HEALTHY attractive 20-something woman with a steady job - to maintain her privacy- I'll call her Jo.

A few days ago she stood up in church and shared the story of her journey to faith. In a calm and confident tone she told of childhood belief giving way to teenage cynicism - and then a case of full-blown hedonism before the shakes set in. Who am I? Why am I here? - and so on.

All this coincided with a Gumble-moment when she was invited along to an Alpha course in a friendly flat nearby. Good stuff ensued, with many clouds lifting, but no blinding conversion. Mr Right was a factor - and a big one at that. They had met, fallen in love and moved in together. Life was sweet - why mess it up with religion?

But the hound of heaven worked overtime and before long, Jo was back knocking on heaven's door and asking all the right questions about God, faith and Jesus. Things started to get serious as her partner (now fiance) announced he was not prepared to marry Mother Theresa and made it clear that Jo had a tough choice to make.

Jo did. And a few days ago explained to a silent congregation the story of grace that led her to walk away from a wedding to a man

she loved deeply.

I have shared a summary - there is so much more to Jo's story - but it serves to illustrate a point. She realised that becoming a follower of Jesus meant a lifestyle revolution.

Conversion as Jo understood it was not a quick makeover a la Changing Rooms (a slap of paint and some magic touches with a piece of MDF) - but a total rebuild.

I listened to Jo telling her story with interest and gratitude to God for some wise friends who handled her well and watched and waited as the Spirit worked.

Jo reached big conclusions because God showed her that life needed to change - not because someone bullied her.

## **Prophets With Funny Voices**

Analysis of contemporary Britain is never hard to come by - not least in church circles. (We used to evangelise but nowadays we analyse). But some of the sharpest comments come from unlikely prophets. Let me mention a couple. First the journalist and broadcaster John Humphreys in his thought-provoking book, 'Devil's Advocate' which provides a social commentary on contemporary Britain. One chapter entitled The Victim Culture

pinpoints the modern fashion for finding someone else to blame and, in his diagnosis, 'Seeing ourselves as victims means we stop seeing ourselves as responsible'<sup>1</sup>.

A second prophetic voice comes from writer Ben Elton in his best selling book and successful stage production 'Popcorn'. One of the characters vents his fury at the way people studiously avoid taking any responsibility for their actions: Nothing is anybody's fault. We don't do wrong, we have problems. We're victims, alcoholics, sexaholics.

Do you know you can be a shopaholic? That's right, people aren't greedy anymore, oh no.

They're shopaholics, victims of commercialism. Victims! People don't fail anymore. They experience negative success.

We're building a culture of gutless, spineless, self-righteous, whining cry-babies who have an excuse for everything and take responsibility for nothing<sup>2</sup>.

So far as I am aware, neither of these gentlemen has a religious axe to grind - yet the point they make is both theologically precise and pastorally accurate. They bemoan the lack of responsibility in our culture and our constant desire to point the finger at others. Good call - but what's the cause and where's the cure?

Lying at the root of this problem is a rejection of any sense of accountability to the God who created us and entrusted to our care the fragile gift of life.

What Humphreys and Elton

describe are the consequences of Paul's argument set out in the last part of Romans chapter 1. People have abandoned God - and once that central pillar falls, others follow.

Whatever happened to sin? There I have mentioned it. I may have got a dozen or so paragraphs into this article - but it had to pop its little head up. However non-PC sin may be nowadays, the Bible has no such embarrassment on the topic. And our abandonment of responsibility can be traced back to that three-lettered source.

Sin may not score many points on a scrabble board but it is indispensable in an accurate diagnosis of life. But whatever happened to sin? There's a lot of it about - it's just we don't seem to call it that anymore.

Garrison Keillor in typically tongue-in-cheek style, tells of a Christian denomination that redrafted their Prayer of Confession to make it more user-friendly. Here's the modernised version:

'Lord, we approach Thy throne of grace, having committed acts which, we do heartily acknowledge, must be very difficult for Thee to understand. Nevertheless, we do beseech Thee to postpone judgement and give Thy faithful servants the benefit of the doubt until such time as we are able to answer all Thy questions fully and clear our reputations in Heaven'<sup>3</sup>.

### **What the Bible Tells us About Sin**

No serious study of the Bible can

avoid the fact it has a great deal to say on the subject of sin. Summed up in a phrase - its serious. The whole elaborate sacrificial system developed in the Old Testament sent a loud and clear message: God is holy - we are not.

Yet God longs for fellowship with people He created and so made a way for sin to be both covered and carried away. When Jesus came, the foreshadowings of the old covenant were fulfilled. As John the Baptist cried as he pointed to Jesus *"Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"* [John 1:29].

Over the next few weeks millions worldwide will view Mel Gibson's new film, 'The Passion', which graphically portrays the last 12 hours of Jesus' earthly life. Many will be left with one aching question as the lights come up. Why?

If Jesus was the Son of God and held ultimate control over those who used, abused then disposed of Him - why did He choose to suffer like that?

One of Jesus inner circle of friends witnessed the crucifixion, with no respite of cinema lights coming up after a couple of hours. Peter explains the mystery of the cross of Christ in this graphic phrase: *"He Himself bore our sins on the tree (cross), so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by His wounds you have been healed"* [1 Peter 2:24]. The Cross is God's ultimate answer to sin.

### **Good News and Bad News**

The good news of God's love is that

sin has been dealt with, Jesus is risen and a new life beckons. But in order to receive the good news we need to understand that it is bad news too. We are sinners that need saving - or to be really personal - I am a sinner that needs saving.

That is a hard idea for proud people to handle. As the Bishop of Durham crisply asserts: 'Often today, people don't believe there is much wrong with the human race, and with themselves in particular. As a result, they don't see very much need for God's grace. Perhaps they think, God might help me out in a tight corner here or there, but basically I can get along fine without Him. All that God has to offer, it seems, is a kind of spiritual enhancement of ordinary life, a gentle enrichment of what's already there rather than a radical rescue from imminent disaster'.

The good bishop is spot on. Grace is for dirty, lost people.

So how do we tell the good news while spelling out the bad news? Some believe that you preach strong and hard - 90% law seasoned with a sprinkling of grace. Others suggest the recipe needs to be the other way round - play up the love of God and play down the idea of personal sin.

To be frank, both paths betray a view that suggest changing lives is something we do rather than something God does. By contrast, recall what Jesus said about the job of the Holy Spirit: *"When He comes, He will convict the world of sin and righteousness and judgement"*

[John 16:8].

Our responsibility is to tell the truth and let the Holy Spirit do the job He does best. Take Jo's story for example. The conclusion she reached about a change of lifestyle came because the Holy Spirit showed her what was needed. It is when we try to do His work for Him that the muddle sets in.

As a pastor and preacher I believe increasingly in the power of God to change people's lives. The longer I go on the more I believe in the power of the good news. But I have learned/am learning seven important lessons along the way.

### **1) Teach the Bible.**

Teach what is there faithfully, stick to the text and you will discover the searchlight of Scripture illuminates dark places better than anything else.

### **2) Be consistent.**

Treat sin as the Bible treats it - with consistency. For example, don't become unbalanced in preaching about sexual sins yet never mention greed, being argumentative or a killer of people's character through gossip.

### **3) Don't soft pedal.**

If God has said something is wrong - then that is what it is. Being less than honest doesn't honour God or help people either in the short term or the long run.

### **4) Talk about grace.**

Jesus is full of grace and truth - and any communication of His word should embody this. Grace without truth is false. Grace and truth makes

sense of each other and set people free.

### **5) Study what God does.**

People like Jo are invaluable and teach me so much. Find those who are new to faith and listen as they describe what Christ has done to bring them into the family of God. How did their understanding of sin, grace and conversion take shape? Listen and learn.

### **6) Expect the Holy Spirit to do His work.**

Experience suggests that revealing sin and pointing to the hope that is in Jesus are best left to the Holy Spirit. When it comes to radical conversion, no-one does it better.

### **7) Conviction or condemnation?**

One valuable pastoral lesson is to never forget the difference between condemnation and conviction. Condemnation is the devil's work and is a hallmark of the kingdom of darkness. It feeds on the awareness of sin but shuts out any rays of hope.

Conviction, on the other hand, is the Holy Spirit's work as He reveals sin and points us to the answer - the empty cross of Jesus. Condemnation is like a fake bank note - utterly useless. But conviction trades in the currency of grace.

And the bank of heaven deals in nothing less.

(1) Devils' Advocate, Hutchison, 2000

(2) Popcorn, Pocket Books, 1997

(3) We Are Still Married, Faber & Faber, 1989

# The Story of Homecoming

By Jill Caratinni

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**R**USSIAN AUTHOR Fyodor Dostoyevsky once observed, "When God is dead anything is possible." It is a most potent statement but sadly, history confirms its truth. When God is dead, the fences of morality are easily plowed over, and we have freely plowed.

I am reminded of a book written about the Holocaust and the men who carried out its murderous plan. Hauntingly titled 'Ordinary Men', the book conveys that these men were not the psychologically crazed bullies we would like to imagine, but average, everyday, ordinary men. They were ordinary men, yet men who committed murder for Hitler. When God is dead anything is possible.

Ravi Zacharias tells a story about a man who approached him after he finished speaking. The man said bluntly, "If I told you all the horrible things I have done in my life you wouldn't even want to be seen standing next to me. There is almost nothing I haven't done. I am not sure even God can forgive me."

Ravi comments that at the time he had to wonder what all was couched beneath those words. Still, the words that came to his mind in response were words spoken by the prophet Isaiah. "*Seek the Lord while He may be found; call on Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake*

*his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him, and to our God, for He will freely pardon*" [Isaiah 55:6-7].

When God is dead, the possibilities are unfathomable. This man's life had been guided by the whims of that certainty. Fyodor Dostoyevsky was one who saw the devastating reality of that truth lived out. But it was the reverse of this truth that changed his life forever. Dostoyevsky's story is one which reminds us to wonder: If anything is possible when God is dead, what then is possible if God is alive?

In prison and facing death, Dostoyevsky discovered the parable of the prodigal son. In that story of homecoming, God was resurrected in his mind. The parable of the prodigal son transformed Dostoyevsky's life. Having the parable read to him was the last request on his deathbed, and it was the story that touched every story that brilliant author ever wrote. He was sublimely aware that the story of homecoming is our own.

Another soul who saw the beauty of the prodigal son worked out in his own life. Describing his own quite reluctant conversion, he exclaims, "Who can duly adore that Love which will open the high gates to a prodigal who is brought in kicking, struggling, resentful, and

darting his eyes in every direction for a chance to escape? The hardness of God is kinder than the softness of men, and His compulsion is our liberation." <sup>1</sup>

Is God something less than alive in your life? As the prophet Isaiah exhorts the weary, let us seek Him while He may be found; let us call on Him while He is near, living lives conscious of the gift of homecoming. Absolutely nothing can separate you from God's love, not even God's seeming "death." Have you killed God in your mind?

He is still alive and his love for you is unchanged. He is near, longing for you to come home.

(Footnote 1: C.S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1955, p. 237)

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## How Great Are Your Works!

**O**NE DAY IN Hyde Park, London, Frank Sheed was speaking about the remarkable order and design of the universe, when a heckler shouted 'Even I could make a better universe than your God!' Unruffled, Sheed replied 'I won't ask you to do that today, but would you mind making a rabbit just to establish credibility?'

Know what? If the earth was as small as the moon, its gravitation couldn't sustain our needs. On the other hand, if it were as large as Jupiter, its extreme gravitation would make human movement almost impossible. If we were as close to the sun as Venus, the heat would be unbearable; if we were as far away as Mars, every region would experience snow and ice nightly. If the oceans were half their size, we'd get only 25% of our present rainfall. If they were one-eighth larger, annual precipitation would increase 400% turning the earth into a vast, uninhabitable swamp. Water solidifies at 32degrees Fahrenheit. But if the oceans were subject to that law, the amount of thawing in the polar regions wouldn't balance out and we'd all end up encased in ice. To prevent this catastrophe, God put salt in the sea to alter its freezing point. *Not a bad day's work!*

David said "*How many are Your works, O Lord! In wisdom You made them all...I will sing praise to my God as long as I live*" [Psalm 104:24-33]. If God's workmanship wouldn't make you want to stop and praise Him, what would?

*Bob Gass*

# Congregational News

## DUNDEE

The congregation enjoyed a communion in April on the morning of Easter Sunday. The previous week, we made special invitations to come to the services that week when the sermon subject was the passion of Christ, the topical talking point in the city at the time. The following week was Easter and the subject was the resurrection.

Leaflets had also been given out around the church. Andy Burns, our outreach worker, is nearly finished a questionnaire and hopefully we will be able to analyse what our neighbourhood think of the church - and then take steps to address the situation.

We are thankful that we are still able to employ Andy, but we are in need of financial help. While his salary is covered at the moment, this has meant a depletion of funds in other needy areas which now need urgent help. We would ask readers to remember these needs to enable our congregation to continue with the weekly costs of running the church with its different ministries. Please do pray that we will be able to meet all our financial obligations. And to honour the Lord. We wish to thank those friends, past and present, who have recently sent in

covenant forms and a monthly donation. This has encouraged us greatly.

## POOLEWE

Local Christians in the wider Gairloch area arranged a Bible-Teaching week-end for Friday 16 and Saturday 17 April in the recently refurbished Poolewe Village Hall.

The speakers were Dr Noel Due and Dr Nick Needham from the Highland Theological College in Dingwall. The subject was "Understanding the Present". The first session conducted by Dr Due, dealt with Postmodernism under the heading "Post....what? - Where are we and how did we get here?". On Saturday afternoon Dr Needham spoke on "Gnosticism Old and New: The New Age in the Church", and on Saturday evening Dr Due based his teaching on Acts 17:15-34, under the title "The Gospel of Christ and the Age in which we live".

On the Lord's Day, Dr Due preached in Gairloch Church of Scotland in the morning on Judges 21:25 ("*Everyone did what was right in his own eyes*"). In the evening at a joint Free Church/ Church of Scotland/APC service in Aultbea Free Church, he gave a short outline on the Book of Revelation

leading to a focus on 'The Throne' and then on 'The Lamb', from Rev chs 4 and 5.

It was a joy and an encouragement to see this large Church building so full of people worshipping the only living and true God. The service closed with the singing of the last 5 stanzas of Psalm 72 ("Of corn an handful in the earth.....Amen, so let it be") to the rousing strains of Effingham. What a fitting close to the week-end!

We pray that all that was taught, and the Word preached, throughout these days will be to the edification of all who were present, and supremely to the glory of God.

### HARRIS

The congregation enjoyed its Communion on the last Lord's Day of April when Revd A M Cattanach preached over the weekend. Please remember to pray for those in the

congregation who are unwell and in particular their elder, Mr Sam Morrison, who is still in hospital.

### STORNOWAY

The "Christianity Explored" course has now finished and prayer is requested for a lasting blessing. The congregation has had several missionaries speaking at their Fellowships and also taking their mid-week meeting. These have included European Missionary Fellowship, Mission Aviation Fellowship, Wycliffe Translators, Leprosy Mission and Worldwide Evangelisation for Christ. These meetings have challenged the congregation and also encouraged them as they saw that God is working in this day and age throughout many places of the world. The usual Communion and Guest Service is planned for the last Lord's Day of May.

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# On Fire for the Lord?

**A** STORY IS TOLD OF Dr W G Sangster who was once a member of a selection panel who were interviewing applicants for the Methodist ministry, when a rather nervous young man presented himself.. Given an opportunity to speak, this candidate said he felt he ought to explain that he was rather shy and was not the sort of person who would ever set the River Thames on fire, that is, create a stir in the city. 'My dear young brother', responded Dr Sangster with consummate wisdom, 'I'm not interested to know if you could set the Thames on fire. What I want to know is this: if I picked you up by the scruff of your neck and dropped you into the Thames, would it sizzle?' In other words was the young man on fire?

# The Christian and the Holy Spirit

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**T**HERE IS SOMETHING that we Christians need to learn and relearn. That is how we live when we are Christians. Sometimes we struggle in the life of faith, sometimes we do not, but how do we live in victorious Christian living? Are you living in victorious Christian living? I hope you are. As most of us will realise through experience, life is not easy a lot of the time. But, you can also live a victorious Christian life in the midst of illness and suffering.

So, do we live this victorious Christian life on our own? No, thankfully we do not.

When we become followers of Christ, when we are forgiven our sin and Christ stands in our place in grace, then the Holy Spirit helps us in our lives. We are born again by the Spirit and we become the temple of the Holy Spirit. We have the blessing of God's presence with us all of the time. Sometimes it does not feel like He is as close as that - but He is. Though we may lose sight of him, yet if we are Christ's we have been sealed by the Holy Spirit when we believed.

One writer said, 'Rightly understood, salvation is the crown

jewel of Christianity and the constant comfort of the Lord's people. But it can also cause much confusion. In fact, surprisingly even in churches that preach the biblical message of salvation, a lot of people are confused about exactly what salvation is and how it works.'

Are you saved? Being saved is not just about being set free from sins condemnation and its eternal punishment. Salvation is about the Christian life, receiving it and living it! If you're saved, here are some things the Holy Spirit is doing in your life. There are many more but I have chosen six for you to think about.

**1. The Holy Spirit is growing you** [Gal. 5:22]. If you're saved, you're changing. You might have symptoms of the old problems but now you don't give into them like you used to. When you are saved, the Spirit is developing in you "... *love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, self-control*" which are the fruits of His character. Christian, are you thinking about what I have just said? The Spirit develops all of Christ's followers. Are you

developing and growing?

Irrespective of my many problems and failures, the people who know me best - family, close friends, those that I work with - would hopefully say, 'Roddy is not who he was five years ago. He has changed.' Is the Holy Spirit growing you? Well then, you will be changing too.

**2. The Holy Spirit has gifted you** [1 Cor. 12]. When the Spirit of God comes into your life He gives a gift or many gifts so that you will desire and have the ability to serve Him. If you're saved, He has gifted you in a specific way so that you can serve the body of Christ. You are prompted to get beyond selfish plastic/consumer Christianity and start to participate in what He is doing to build His kingdom.

**3. The Holy Spirit convicts you of sin** [John 16:8]. Do you say, This might sound mad but before I knew Christ I could lie, and steal and never even feel bad about it. Since I became a Christian, every time I do anything wrong this siren goes off inside me. That's the Spirit at work, convicting you of sin. If you can sin and not be grieved, ask yourself if you're really saved? That is a serious question. If you sin and don't feel bad about it, then there is something wrong in your Christian life.

**4. The Holy Spirit causes you to hunger for truth** [John 16:13]. Was there a time when you couldn't have cared less about the Bible? If

somebody said to you, 'Are you reading the Bible?' you would say, 'No, but I am reading Tom Clancy's, 'The Bear and the Dragon' '. The bible was just another book to you then. But when you became a Christian, a desire to learn from and about the bible came alive in your heart. If that's going on in your life, it's a good sign.

**5. The Holy Spirit leads you** [Rom. 8:14]. What does *that* mean? One writer said, 'God's Spirit prompts you to make things right with others, to respond to the message that you hear at church, to want to do the thing that honours Him. When you're being led by the Spirit, you know there's something going on in your heart.' The scriptures say, *"As many as are led by the Spirit of God these are the children of God."*

**6. The Holy Spirit comforts you** [John 14:16]. When we are unwell or if we are facing serious problems, we can be tempted to think that God is far away from us. So the idea that the Spirit is a comfort can seem shallow, but believe me, it is the most amazing blessing for Christ's people to realise that he is there in the tough situations. He's not miles away! The Psalmist saw that in Psalm 23, where he went through the valley of the shadow of death. Some parts of life are very painful to take, and our fears can be very real, but the Psalmist keeps on going and says, *"I will fear no evil, for you are with me."*

There are many times in our lives when we might feel that we don't need this comfort. Life just goes on. But there are also very testing times in our lives when we are desperate for this comfort. We can depend on him in all our fears, because he is present in His comforting power when we are His people. God wants you to know that you're His child. As Romans 8:16

said, *"the Spirit of God bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God."*

Sometimes we Christians find 'living the faith' hard to do. But the simple message from me is this. Just as you started following Christ, by faith, so live in him by faith. My hope and prayer is that you flourish in your life with this amazing God, who is our Saviour.

## **The Moral and Spiritual State of our Nation is in Crisis!**

Please join in prayer with

**CHRISTIAN VOICE**

([www.christianvoice.org.uk](http://www.christianvoice.org.uk))

who have arranged a

# **Day of Prayer & Fasting For National Repentance**

**WEDNESDAY 2nd JUNE 2004**

**(Coronation Day) 11am to 5.30pm**

**Westminster Chapel, Buckingham Gate**

**London SW1**

Free Admission

*"Sanctify ye a fast, call a solemn assembly, gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the Lord your God and cry unto the Lord" [Joel 1:15]*

info@christianvoice.org.uk or tel 01994 484 544

# Prayer Point for UK

The serious matter below reflects the trend in our society. We are grateful to The Christian Institute for their work in this area.

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**T**HE STUDENT UNION at Hull University is threatening to ban the Christian Union because it doesn't allow non-Christians to run it.

The Student Union has voted against ratifying the CU's constitution because it has a Christians-only leadership policy. The Student Union has threatened to revoke the CU's status as a Union society unless it changes its constitution.

The CU (affiliated to the UCCF) has not backed down. It has taken legal advice and instructed a solicitor. There is a clear breach of Education and Human Rights laws. In our opinion, the Union has acted unlawfully.

There has been significant local and national media interest in this story.

The CU contacted The Christian Institute for assistance and we have been supporting them throughout. For more information, visit the Christian Institute website: <http://www.christian.org.uk>

Hull Christian Union needs our support and our prayers:

\* Pray for student Simeon

Livesey, who has been largely responsible dealing with this matter on behalf of the Christian Union. Pray that he would know the encouragement of God's people and that he would be given great wisdom.

\* Pray for the members of the Christian Union, that they would be encouraged in their faithful stand.

\* Pray for those Christian students who will be speaking to the media. Pray that they will know wisdom and courage.

\* Pray that the media would report the issue fairly and accurately. Pray that the story would be given wide publicity - so that other CUs around the nation will be encouraged by Hull CU's faithfulness.

\* Pray that there would be a swift resolution to this matter which restores the CU to its status as a Union society and maintains the legitimate right of the CU to have a Christians-only leadership policy.

*Colin Hart*  
*Director*  
*The Christian Institute*  
*Telephone: 0131 226 3555*

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***"What can the righteous do?" [Psalm 11:3]***

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# Prayer Point for.....

## SUFFERING BRETHREN AROUND THE WORLD

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### **VIETNAM - 13 April 2004**

Hundreds of Vietnamese Christians killed over Easter Weekend. An estimated 400 Christians have been killed in brutal repression of peaceful and prayerful demonstrations by Christians in the Central Highlands of Vietnam.

On Saturday 10 April up to 400,000 Vietnamese Christians, from the Degar people, gathered in several Vietnamese cities to demonstrate against the government's refusal to allow them to follow the Christian faith freely. The demonstrators in the cities, which included the Central Highland city of Buonmathuot, were attacked by soldiers, police and other Vietnamese civilians. The Christians were shot at, beaten with electric batons and bombarded with rocks and stones. Hundreds were killed (400 according to one report) and many others have suffered broken bones.

In a press release on 9 April an organisation representing the largely Christian Degar people, known as the Montagnard Foundation, drew attention to the planned demonstrations, which were to include a specific call for the Vietnamese government to lift the embargo on international human rights monitoring in the Central Highlands area. In a word of warning concerning the demonstra-

tions the Foundation cautioned that "Without the direct intervention of law abiding states, the UN and the European Commission, the repression against the Montagnards will be bloody." How tragically accurate was this prediction.

It is also feared that this incident may spark a refugee crisis, with thousands likely to head for the Cambodian border. To add to their woes the Cambodians have closed this border to refugees.

In a statement issued after the demonstrations had begun, the President of the Montagnard Foundation said that no attempt was made by the Christians to use violence. He also stated that the Christians are not seeking independence, merely the right to worship freely.

The Foundation has stated that "Our people cannot continue suffering this way as the Vietnamese government continues to arrest, electric shock torture, and kill our peaceful hill tribe people for being Christian or for trying to save our ancestral land from being confiscated."

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# Essential Things

By Revd Dr A S WAYNE PEARCE, (Dundee)

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IT WAS THE godly, Richard Baxter who once so wisely said that 'in essential things unity, in doubtful things liberty, but in all things charity.' Here I want to focus on essential things. And I want to ask why it is that so many Reformed churches and denominations are, generally speaking, failing so miserably in focusing on the essentials?

While I hesitate to use the expression, given what happened to John Major and his government in the 1990s, I believe that we need to get back to basics - the biblical basics! We need to focus on the essentials, which sadly appear to have been obscured and subordinated to traditions and other concerns at the present time.

Many who would call themselves Reformed would have no difficulty in reciting the 'solas - scriptura, gratia, fides, Christos', but are we applying these great truths in our individual and collective lives? We have the head knowledge but are these things truly written on our hearts? Moreover where are the fruits of the Spirit? God's word says: *"the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith. Meekness, temperance..."* [Gal: 18-23].

We all know of particular churches that are as warm and

inviting as a mortuary slab. Where are the grace, love and joy? If a stranger were to come into our congregations would these fruits be clearly manifest? We are to reach out in love and to love one another. And this is a necessity if we are to be obedient to Christ our Lord and do the first things well.

In a somewhat crude and simplistic fashion I want to suggest to you that Christ's church has an external and an internal function. And these are the very essentials I want to focus upon in this article.

Firstly the church has an external function. We read at the very end of the gospel according to Matthew: *"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen"* [Mat 28: 16-20].

Note who it is that is addressing the church! It is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. He is not merely inviting or suggesting that if His church is mindful and has some spare time on its hands that it might on occasion engage in missionary and evangelistic work but instead He issues a direct command. He doesn't say that some or a little

power or authority (NKJV) has been given unto Me but instead He says ALL power is given unto Me, in heaven and in earth.

Do you submit to His rule and seek to obey His commands? He demands our whole-hearted allegiance. We must contend earnestly for Christ's crown and covenant!

Now what is it that Christ commands his church to do? Verse 19 is clear. We are to GO. This takes resolve, determination, action and commitment. We are not invited to wait, as if men, women and children will automatically come along to our services once they hear that there is a witness in their locale because they are not coming. Instead we are to *"Go ye therefore, and teach all nation's, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost"*.

I prefer the NKJV translation which is more accurate *"Go therefore and **make disciples** of all the nations"*. Sounds dreadfully Arminian does it not! But we must never forget that the Lord uses means in the calling of His elect out of the world. We know that God is sovereign in the salvation of His people but also from a human perspective there are three basic steps in the salvation and spiritual development of each and every Christian.

Firstly there is a turning to the Lord, which is conversion. We must repent of our sins and turn away from self, sin and Satan and turn to Christ as our Lord and only

Saviour. Now we know that this is God's doing but this can only be known with hindsight.

Then there is following after the Lord, which is discipleship. All Christians need to grow in knowledge and grace. God not only justifies but He sanctifies and will glorify His adopted children. And finally there is testifying for the Lord which is witnessing. This is not the preserve of the minister or pastor or elder but each and every Christian should be able to tell others of the reason for the hope that is in them.

We are to be salt and light in an unsavoury and darkened world. We have good news to share with all indiscriminately!

And how are we to teach the nations or make disciples? Well quite simply by preaching, teaching, proclaiming and sharing the gospel. Christ says, *"Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature"* [Mar 16: 15].

Not all are called to preach and teach in Christ's church but surely all can point men and women to the Lamb which takes away the sin of the world! Surely most are capable of handing a Bible, book or tract to someone! Surely all can invite someone along to church!

Like Andrew or Philip in John's gospel we must all be ready to say to the unconverted, 'Come and see!' Taste and see that the Lord is gracious! Surely church leaders should be encouraging their congregations to share their faith with family, friends, neighbours, work colleagues and the like. Why

then is it that in so many churches these things are almost alien concepts today?

Why is it that there are a growing number of Reformed people against the 'free offer of the gospel'? There are too many, who tortoise like, keep their heads well inside their shells fearing contamination from the world. Or maybe some are like hedgehogs who when confronted with the unknown roll themselves into a ball. Many churches are like rolled-up hedgehogs - inward looking and parochial and just as prickly when confronted by the Truth.

Where have the pharisaic, hyper-separatistic and exclusivistic practices that are an altogether common feature in parts of the Reformed constituency come from? They were certainly unknown to Luther and Calvin and the sixteenth century reformers and are unknown to all those who have been true to the Reformed and Biblical Faith.

We need to look to and follow the example of men like George Wishart, John Knox, Robert Murray McCheyne, George Whitefield, Charles Haddon Spurgeon and so many others who looked to their Lord in the administration of grace and truth in equal measure. We need to remind ourselves that our Lord says that the fields are white unto harvest.

How often we pray for revival without acting on our prayers. We need to remind ourselves that God puts His treasure

in earthen vessels. He uses the weak and beggarly thing like you and me, so that all the glory might redound to Him alone. We need to remind ourselves of the word that our Lord spoke to Gideon: "*Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee*" [Jud.6:13-14].

We must obey the Great Commission acknowledging and trusting in the sovereign authority and power of the One who sends His church into the world with that glorious message of reconciliation. We preach not ourselves but Christ and him crucified! Verse 20 in Mat 28, says that we are to baptise in the name of the triune God and teach all things. I ask that you fix your eyes and hearts on the promise given by our Lord that if we are true to Him then He is with us always even unto the end of the world.

Christ is our Emmanuel - God with us for now and all eternity. Nevertheless we must take heed of the warning given to the church in Ephesus: "*Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast, left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent*" [Rev.2:4-5].

Let us obey our Lord and His Great Commission. The church that does not evangelise must surely fossilize! Let us boldly proclaim and share the Gospel to the praise and glory of God alone.

# Desert Island Castaway

Catherine Mackenzie - the Interviewer herself is on the Island!

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**C**ATHERINE MACKENZIE is an author and children's editor from Christian Focus Publications, Scotland. Spending a large part of her life around books you might think she was the obvious choice to send to this particular desert island. Lets see what her first memories are of books.

Books have played a large part in my family life. The bible was read as part of family devotions every morning and evening as far back as I can remember. It must have been a difficult habit to start when I think about it. Children and babies are not always the easiest people to have around when you want a time of meditation on God.

Family life was hectic, but despite this, devotions were started and stuck at throughout my childhood and adult life. I did not appreciate it then – but I am thankful for it now. It was a discipline that I learned from and could do with learning from again in my own adult life. But books weren't just part of a God given duty – there was a passion there too as we learnt bible stories and devoured picture books.

I have one particular memory from when I was four years old. My mother was trying to persuade me to take some hideously pink medicine. Nothing she could do could persuade me to open my

mouth. However my father produced a picture book about Gideon from his brief case. My choice was clear. Take the medicine and I get the book. I grimaced, took a deep breath and swallowed. I got my book.

## **Do you think you'll survive on this Desert Island?**

I seriously doubt it. I'm not very practical. But one thing that will be good is that there will be a serious lack of any type of electrical or mechanical machinery to go wrong. If I were on my own in a deserted electrical goods store it would be a recipe for disaster.

## **You're allowed to take a copy of the bible and the pilgrim's progress with you. What three other books will you be taking with you and why?**

That is a very very hard question. I suppose if we aren't going to be given any orientation classes I will really need a book that will teach me how to catch a fish, gut it and cook it. How to build a fire in the first place – I don't want to eat raw fish! Yuck! For the first time in my whole adult life I am NOT going to need a diet book! Hurray! But out of the books that I have read recently the three books that I would take with me would be Denise George, 'Teach Your Children to Pray'. It's the best

parenting book I've ever read. Though not a parent myself – I really feel that this book inspires prayer full stop – with or without kids. '[The Endless Steppe](#)' by Esther Hautzig – the autobiography of a young Jewish girl whose family was exiled from Poland during the Second World War. '[The Pearl](#)' by John Steinbeck, is a short but tragic story about a man who finds the biggest pearl in the world but lets greed and fear take over his life and in the end he loses what is really the most precious thing in his life, his child. But I think I would definitely swap all three of these books for three books that I haven't read. I am looking for a good biography on Jan Huss at the moment so if anyone can recommend one that would be good. I have yet to read a book called '[The Heavenly Man](#)' about a Chinese Christian, Brother Yun and I have just started to read '[War and Peace](#)' by Tolstoy.

### **What would be the one luxury?**

I am sorry but I think it should be another book. I think I will take a Bible Dictionary as I like to read through themes in my bible readings but perhaps my copy of the bible will have a good dictionary at the end of it anyway – in which case can I have a packet of pencils and a notebook?

### **All right you're allowed that and the Pilgrim's Progress. Have you read that book before?**

Yes. Dad read it to us as kids. Giant despair is the character that looms

large in my mind as I remember looking at the pictures over his shoulder. But if I ever go walking I often think of Christian climbing the hill of difficulty – and keep promising myself that I must get fit. By the way did you listen to Radio 4's dramatisation of the Pilgrim's Progress the other month? It was excellent. Well worth listening to if they repeat it or if they bring it out on tape.

### **And finally – if you were to send a book to a non-Christian while you are staying on a desert island what would you send?**

I find this question really difficult to answer, which is a bit rich coming from me as I have asked so many people the same question. It depends on what non-Christian I was sending it to. In my own experience as a non-believer it was God's word in unexpected places that affected me the most. Whatever I would do I would send them a portion of scripture and perhaps a biography of someone who has really inspired me? But in reality the Bible does both of these – it's God's word, it has power, and it's about Jesus. Because I want to send lots of different bits from lots of different books – I think what I might end up doing is making a book for this friend out of my notebook and pencils that you've already given me. I think a personal, loving touch, is invaluable when you are communicating the personal, loving Christ.

# True Love - 'Out of the Mouths of Babes....'

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**A** GROUP OF 4-8 year olds was asked, "What does love mean?" Here are some of their answers:

"When my grandmother got arthritis, she couldn't bend over and cut her toenails anymore so my grandfather does it for her all the time, even when his hands got arthritis too. That's love." Rebecca — age 8

"When someone loves you, the way they say your name is different. You know that your name is safe in their mouth." Billy — age 4

"Love is when you go out to eat and give somebody most of your French fries without making them give you any of theirs." Chrissy — age 6

"Love is what makes you smile when you're tired." Terri — age 4

"Love is when my mommy makes coffee for my daddy and she takes a sip before giving it to him, to make sure the taste is okay." Danny — age 7

"Love is what's in the room with you at Christmas if you stop opening presents and listen." Bobby — age 7

"If you want to learn to love better, you should start with a friend who you hate." Nikka — age 6

"Love is when you tell a guy you like his shirt, then he wears it every day."

Noelle — age 7

"Love is like a little old woman and a little old man who are still friends even after they know each other so well." Tommy — age 6

"During my piano recital I was on a stage and I was scared. I looked at all the people watching me and saw my daddy waving and smiling. He was the only one doing that. I wasn't scared anymore." Cindy — age 8

"My mommy loves me more than anybody. You don't see anyone else kissing me to sleep at night." Clare — age 6

"Love is when Mommy gives Daddy the best piece of chicken." Elaine — age 5

"Love is when Mommy sees Daddy smelly and sweaty and still says he is handsomer than Brad Pitt." Chris — age 7

"I know my older sister loves me because she gives me all her old clothes and has to go out and buy new ones." Lauren — age 5

"When you love somebody, your eyelashes go up and down and little stars come out of you." Karen — age 7

"You really shouldn't say 'I love you' unless you mean it. But if you mean it, you should say it a lot. People forget." Jessica — age 8

*From 'Preaching Now' website.*

# Jesus

DID YOU KNOW THAT JESUS spoke more about judgment than His love? Would you have guessed that He talked about money as often as about God? Have you noticed that He hardly ever mentioned **church** but constantly talked about **Kingdom**? Why did He rarely talk about **conversion** but frequently spoke about **discipleship**? Why did religious leaders dislike Him but bad characters flock to hear Him?

Here is a tradesman living in an obscure province of the Roman Empire, a man who never left His own country and culture, who could not lay a finger on the levers of power even there and who never committed to writing a word of His own. Yet He says to people in every age and culture, dwelling under whatever secular or religious power, 'Trust Me. I am worthy of your complete faith and commitment. I can carry anything you can put on Me. I won't let you down.'

We hear Him claim to be 'God-made-visible'. We see Him handing out God's forgiveness. He calmly announces that He will be the arbiter in the Last Day of Judgment for all mankind. And what He claims He proves. That, at any rate, is what millions of people living nineteen hundred years later believe and discover.

What is it about Him that makes Him good news? The Christian message does not merely point to a set of propositions about the Son of God who came for our salvation. Nor does it offer redemption through embracing a correct theology of the Atonement and a satisfactory statement of what Jesus did at the cross. It is Christ who saves us - not statements about Him.

*Donald Bridge*

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## Cars and Haircuts

A YOUNG BOY HAD JUST gotten his driving licence. He asked his father, who was a minister, if they could discuss his use of the car. His father said to him, "I'll make a deal with you. You bring your grades up, study your Bible a little, and get your hair cut, then we will talk about it."

A month later the boy came back and again asked his father if they could discuss his use of the car. His father said, "Son, I'm real proud of you. You have brought your grades up, you've studied your Bible diligently, but you didn't get your hair cut!"

The young man waited a moment and replied, "You know, Dad, I've been thinking about that. I've read in the Bible that Samson had long hair, Moses had long hair, Noah had long hair, and even Jesus had long hair."

His father replied, "Yes, Son, and if you read on further you'll find out that they walked everywhere they went!!"

# A Home or a House?

**A** LITTLE BOY NAMED Danny lived with his family in a trailer. One day someone asked him, "Don't you wish you had a real home?" Danny's reply was wise beyond his years. He said, "We have a real home. We just don't have a house to put it in."

There is a world of a difference between a home and a house. A house is just a physical structure, made perhaps of brick or wood or stone. It can be large or small. It may not even have people inside it. It can stand alone and be uninhabited.

A home on the other hand, is not just a place of shelter, but is a place where there are people who love us unconditionally, accept us as we are, faults and all. Any decent contractor can construct a house. But only God can build a home. *"Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands"* [2 Cor 5:15 NIV].

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