

# Tuckingmill Baptist Church, Camborne



## October 2021

I have just noticed again - as we all probably need to, from time to time - how flimsy our lives can be, and how frail our sense of contentment.

All over within 24 hours (quite amazingly, really), and back immediately to whatever passes for normal nowadays. All the effect of a single four-letter word that has taken on a new and specific meaning this year: *PING!*



I'm preparing this magazine a lot earlier in the month, because Jenny and I are due to be away during most of the fortnight

leading up to the first Sunday of October - *publication date!* But all of our current preparations were suddenly made to look uncomfortably provisional when we looked at our phones one morning ... to see a message waiting for us on the NHS Covid-19 app.

Of course we are not the sole recipients of such. There has been this “pingdemic” (I groan as I even type this word!) recently. I had understood what this means, theoretically. Now I had a minor dose of the reality.

And also “of course”, it's not anywhere near as devastating as it would have been a couple of months back. We're fully vaccinated, so it's not a case of automatic shut-in for 10 days (of which our grandson Toby has had *three*, poor kid!). But the recommendation is still to go for one of those PCR tests.

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I have to say that I am seriously impressed at the system that we have locally. Within an hour of the initial *PING*, we were walking into the testing centre at Heartlands, all the booking stuff done instantaneously over the Net on my mobile. And the result came through to my mobile by the time I checked in on the next day ... though more of that later.

The thing is, though, the further “advice” we received: a recommendation to self-isolate until the result comes through, in “24-48 hours” (though it was even faster, we were to find).

But suddenly, our diaries (the next day was full of meetings, only one of which was scheduled for Zoom) had to be rearranged, not at all convenient, really.

And, possibly more significantly, we had just made bookings for accommodation for that holiday, starting a mere seven days later. If this test comes back positive ... we might *just* still manage to get through the self-isolation period (incidentally and curiously, presuming that we wouldn't suffer seriously from the Virus) and then head off out of county for the main part of the holiday. The latent Pharisee inside each of us certainly woke up in me. So many days of isolation ... but not an instant more! Days starting precisely when? Calendar days? Or from

the hour (or precise moment) we received the test results? How fine can we cut this?



And then (and again, so impressed with this system serving us so well!) when we get the all-clear ... having had to stay at home merely from midday to the start of the following day ... I felt a ridiculous amount of not just relief, but *release*. This needed celebrating! ... or at least a trip to Costa's!

But I sometimes think about stuff like this. What we have experienced has been a minor inconvenience, but it challenged, for a while at least, my sense of security.

We have presumed less, this last year, on our ability to go where we fancy, when we fancy - and not thinking merely about overseas holidays! But as time has gone on, and the country has emerged from Lockdown, that old presumption can start to take shape again.

A friend of mine still starts Facebook posts of his intentions with “God-willing”. I object to the hyphen, but his attitude is right. As the apostle James (4:14) says, “... yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring”.

No, we don't. We constantly need to be reminded of that - and drawn back to the only *real* security of the faithful love of our heavenly Father. And that is a security far more profound than simply the ability to fulfill all the engagements we might have added to a diary. It is not everlasting availability to attend meetings, or go on holidays; it is "I have loved you with an everlasting love" (Jeremiah 31:3).

So I found that the roots of my security were not sunk deep enough into the bedrock of God's being. But neither was my contentment.

Of course I say that "I *need* a holiday". But modern holidays were not enjoyed by people of previous generations. They were not accorded so many weeks of paid leave. Travel as we know it nowadays was way beyond their imagination. And how *could* they up and off for a few days ... if there are cows to be milked, and crops to be tended. A day or two of occasional celebrations, maybe ... but living at subsistence level left very little leeway for any scamping off those ever-present daily responsibilities.

So I *need* a holiday? Perhaps there are pressures nowadays which our forebears didn't know much about, and which do

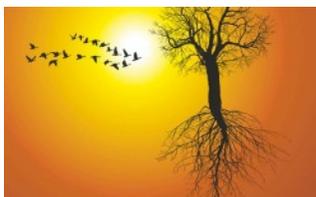
warrant some recuperation from. Or perhaps we simply deceive ourselves, so that we can in good conscience pamper ourselves. You could argue this one around, if you were so minded.

But I was certainly unhappy to have the prospect of a couple of weeks visiting various people and places around the country potentially vanish from right under my nose. Not that it actually lasted long enough for me to work up a real strop about it, but ... this challenges my idea about how contented a person I am.

Easy enough to be contented when things are going well. Or should I say, easy enough *to fool myself* about being contented when things are going well. But what about when our plans *don't* come off? When we can no longer do what we used to when we are younger? What about when "the evil days come and the years draw near of which you will say, 'I have no pleasure in them'"?

Just as with security, the only sound foundation for our *contentment* does not lie within this world. "This world", John wrote (1 John 2:17), "is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever."

Peter Ham



<b>Sunday meetings:</b>	<b>10.00 a.m.</b>	<b>6.30 p.m. (cafe church)</b>
3 <sup>rd</sup> October	Phil Willetts	Communion then video
10 <sup>th</sup> October	Guest service: Matthew 21:23-32	Following on from a.m.
17 <sup>th</sup> October	Matthew 21:33-46	Following on from a.m.
24 <sup>th</sup> October	Matthew 22:1-14	Following on from a.m.
31 <sup>st</sup> October	Matthew 22:15-22	Following on from a.m.
7 <sup>th</sup> November	Matthew 22:23-33	Following on from a.m.

**Other meetings:**

6 <sup>th</sup> October	7.30	Joint prayer meeting @ CCC
7 <sup>th</sup> October	2.00	Elders' meeting
9 <sup>th</sup> October	6.00	Skittles @ Townshend
14 <sup>th</sup> October	7.30	Mission meeting (Phil & Lydia Evans)
16 <sup>th</sup> October	10.00	Prayer meeting
	7.00	<i>Caring for Life</i> prayer meeting
21 <sup>st</sup> October	<b>10.00</b>	Prayer meeting
28 <sup>th</sup> October	7.30	Mission prayer meeting
30 <sup>th</sup> October	7.30	Rendezvous (Paul Gardner @ Carnhell Green)
4 <sup>th</sup> November	7.30	Prayer meeting



	<b>Stewards</b>	<b>Teas</b>	<b>Flowers</b>	<b>Creche</b>	<b>Cleaning</b>
<b>3 Oct</b>	Jenny	Arwen / Jennifer	Marsha	Marsha	Greg / Marsha
<b>10 Oct</b>	Greg	Marsha / Jenny	Lilian	Jenny	J/J/J Carter
<b>17 Oct</b>	Heather	June / Phil	Jenny	Marsha	Peter / Jenny
<b>24 Oct</b>	Kay	Heather / John B	Kay	Jenny	Heather / Kay
<b>31 Oct</b>	Jenny	Arwen / Jennifer	Heather	Marsha	Greg / Marsha
<b>7 Nov</b>	Greg	Marsha / Jenny	Marsha	Jenny	J/J/J Carter
<b>14 Nov</b>	Heather	June / Phil	Lilian	Marsha	Peter / Jenny
<b>21 Nov</b>	Kay	Heather / John B	Jenny	Jenny	Heather / Kay

(Cleaning is for the week *following* the stated Sunday)

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## October 2021

### Living with difference

This summary of Jonathan Lamb's new book, *Essentially One*, appeared recently in *Evangelicals Now*

In 2018, the Oxford English Dictionary's word of the year was 'toxic'. The word was used widely in a range of environmental and social contexts and, significantly, it was often linked to poisonous relationships and harsh rhetoric, not least in the world of politics.

One UK Labour MP, Laura Pidcock, captured newspaper headlines when she said she could never be friends with a Conservative: 'I have absolutely no intention of being friends with any of them.' She saw them as 'the enemy'. Adversarial and polarised attitudes are not limited to the world of politics. We find them closer to home too. 'Truth before friendship' was the unfortunate slogan among some US conservative Reformed Christians, leading John Frame to comment: 'We must not speak the truth without thinking of the effect of our formulations on our fellow Christians, even our opponents.' This is fundamental to the way we act and speak, particularly in situations of conflict between believers.



Whenever Christians are in fellowship, there are sure to be differences. These might be cultural – to do with social class, education, or lifestyle. They might be historical – Christians do not always find it easy to forget past injuries, be they old family feuds, marriage break-ups, or even hurtful remarks made many years earlier. Classically, of course, differences can be doctrinal. And there is the inevitable diversity of personality types and temperaments.

No Christian group is without a range of differences with which it must come to terms if it is to survive. Differing convictions on some issues have to be contained within a fellowship, but the way in which this is managed can lead either to positive growth or to fracture and division. Certainly, Paul refused to tolerate error and insisted on gospel

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priorities, but he recognized that, in many situations, Christians might not see eye to eye and he gave wise advice on how to handle this.

A minister was once asked if he had an active congregation. 'Oh, yes,' he replied. 'They're very active. Half of them are working with me and half of them against me.' It doesn't take long before groups emerge in the church, clustered around their own interests, defining themselves as truly spiritual over against the others in their fellowship.

Paul confronts cliquy attitudes in Romans 14. He provides us with a practical 'doctrine of difference' which, properly understood, will help us to handle our disagreements with conviction and compassion, something greatly needed in today's evangelical community. He begins with reference to 'quarrelling over disputable matters' (v1), and it is clear, from both the immediate and the wider context, that he is not speaking about fundamental doctrines.

Paul is addressing two groups of Christians, the 'weak' and the 'strong'. The weak objected to buying meat which had been left over from pagan temple sacrifices, not because it was meat as such, but because of its association with idol temples. They were also concerned to follow traditions and regulations regarding the Sabbath. In their view, the second group – the strong – were careless and indifferent, quite unspiritual in the way they disregarded what God had commanded. So the weak were committed to upholding God's standards; all the more so in the light of the lax and casual attitudes of some of their fellow believers.

The strong, on the other hand, thought that food was food, wherever it came from; similarly, one day was just the same as the next. After all, Christians enjoyed liberty. In their view, the weak were in bondage to tradition and far too rigid in their application of religious regulations: the strong were the really spiritual.

In handling this potentially divisive situation, Paul displays a tender and wise pastoral concern for the well-being of the Christian community. We can highlight five principles which will help us to live together with differences.

### **Principle 1: solidarity**



Paul reminds them first that they belong together in Christ. He urges them to accept one another on the basis of their common life: 'Accept him whose faith is weak' (14:1); 'Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you' (15:7). The other person is someone of such worth that Jesus laid down his life for them. We should have this

uppermost in our minds in any situation of disagreement. 'If your brother or sister is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy someone for whom Christ died' (14:15).

Our brothers and sisters have been accepted unreservedly by God, so in any dispute with other Christians we must remember that they are members of the same family. How can we possibly exclude those whom God has accepted? We cannot behave with a cavalier attitude towards others for whom Christ died. To reject a fellow believer is a serious issue: you will be rejecting the work of Christ. So Paul is urging us to view our differences in the light of the big gospel realities.

Commenting on differences amongst believers concerning the details of Christ's second coming, Norman Doughty asks: 'Shall we who are relying on the same Redeemer,

begotten by the same God, inhabited by the same Spirit, incorporated in the same body, entrusted with the same gospel, assaulted by the same devil, hated by the same world, delivered from the same hell and destined for the same glory – shall we who have so much in common allow ourselves to be divided in heart or service because, just because we are of different minds on this secondary matter? God forbid.'

### **Principle 2: accountability**



The fact that we are all members of God's family means that we are all responsible to the one Judge. 'You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat' (14:10). In the light of that sobering reality, we should not hastily judge others, jumping to conclusions about their lax attitude to the Bible or their rigid spirituality. Each of us is responsible to our Lord, so Paul continues: 'Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall' (14:4). Every aspect of my life is to be lived for Him (14:6-8), and that should shape how I treat others. After all, both the weak and the strong are seeking to please their Master.

Criticism can be enormously destructive in a Christian fellowship. Theologian Fred Bruce once said that there is no sin to which Christians – especially keen Christians – are more prone than that of criticising others. Should we imagine that we are not guilty of such a judgemental spirit, Paul adds another word of caution. Don't look down on other Christians, don't treat them with contempt (14:3). We should not belittle others when God values them so much. Certainly, we are responsible to think things through for ourselves: 'Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind' (14:5). It is important that we educate our conscience and obey it, living consistently with what we understand to be the truth (14:22–23). We are all in need of training our consciences, and the conscience of a fellow believer is not to be mocked or belittled but, rather, respected.

### **Principle 3: harmony**



We are not isolated individuals but members of a body, so it is the responsibility of each of us to work for the well-being of the whole fellowship. Christians who believe they enjoy freedom must balance their liberty with love for others who might be harmed by their example. Christians who have scruples regarding lifestyle or religious observance must learn not to criticise those who do not share them. If we wish to stand for our convictions, then we should do so in such a way that builds up rather than tears down, to make every effort to do what leads to peace (14:19; 15:2).

This will mean creating harmony at every opportunity, and developing the much-needed ministry of encouragement. We should not insist on our point of view but, instead, 'shoulder the burden of the doubts and qualms of others and not just ... go our own sweet way' (15:1, Phillips translation). Sometimes a disagreement between Christians takes on a life of its own, gradually developing into a running quarrel. We need to work energetically for peace, showing the same spirit as J. C. Ryle: 'Keep the walls of separation as low as possible, and shake hands over them as often as you can.'

### **Principle 4: humility**

Here we have our greatest motivation. Romans 14 and 15 provide a clear example of Paul's Christocentricity, as repeatedly he urges us to follow in the footsteps of the Lord

Jesus: 'For even Christ did not please himself' (15:3); we need 'the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had' (15:5); and 'Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you' (15:7).

If we belong to Christ and live under His lordship, then we must live His life – including in the way we treat our fellow believers with whom we disagree. When Paul was under extreme pressure – especially from those whose actions towards him we might today describe as toxic – his response is significant: 'By the humility and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you' (2 Corinthians 10:1). In situations of relational conflict, the force of Romans 14 and 15 couldn't be more direct or challenging. The word which Paul uses for 'bearing' with the failings and weaknesses of others (15:1) is the same word that is used of Christ bearing his cross. We are called to follow the example of Christ.

### **Principle 5: priority**

I was once in touch with a group of Christians seeking to witness to Christ on a large housing estate. They started a youth club, committed to building bridges of friendship with local teenagers. But within a few weeks, the work had been closed down. The reason was a disagreement among the church leaders over one issue: whether girls coming to the youth club should be allowed to enter the building wearing trousers. They held a particular view of the manner of dress which was appropriate in a church building. For those with a vision for evangelism on the estate and a commitment to compassionate care for the young people concerned, such a disagreement was heartbreaking. Yet the story could be multiplied many times over in one form or another. It is one of the prime strategies of the devil to divert Christians from the work of God by distracting them with secondary matters or leading them into time-consuming debates about trivia.



In Paul's doctrine of difference, the most critical emphasis is this: be clear about what matters. Determine your priorities. 'For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit' (14:17). Life in God's kingdom cannot be reduced to what we should eat and drink, what we should wear, what church furniture we should buy, or what time our services should be. The real priority is that Christians should display righteousness, peace and joy, and that the gospel should speed on and triumph.

Seek first the kingdom, Jesus urged. There is no better way to confront the potentially divisive issues in our fellowships than by concentrating on what really matters. Paul's key priority is that our eyes should be focused on Christ and that our goal should be God's glory (15:5–6).

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