

Welcome to Issue 24 of LEAF's quarterly newsletter.

We have devoted the second page of this quarter's newsletter to the revised EA basis of faith. This has been agreed after several years work and will be adopted later in the year.

The LEAF diary is enclosed – giving news of forthcoming events in the area. In particular we encourage you to ensure that the **LEAF Annual Celebration** is in your diary – **Sunday 9th October, Ashley Baptist, 6.30pm** – with guest speaker the Bishop of Southampton. We will be designating this Sunday **LEAF PRAYER SUNDAY** – more on that later.

Also planned for the Autumn is **The Best is Yet to Come** – an exciting event for the older generation - **Saturday 12th November at St Saviours Brockenhurst, 10.30am – 4.30 pm.**

We have not included a separate prayer focus this month, but as we continue to focus our thoughts and our hearts on our call as Christians to mission, I would encourage you to read the article below and to make it a specific focus for your personal prayer life over the coming weeks.

We are praying with Carol about how the Youth Initiative should develop and change over the months ahead and are working on some exciting new opportunities for the future. Please pray for wisdom, particularly for Carol, and that we will impact the young people of the Forest in the most effective manner. We will be in a position to report fully on the developments next time.



Aligning our hearts with the heart of God

We think we know John 3:16, but do we *really* know it? The phrase "*God so loved the world*" trips off the tongue so easily, but have we really caught hold of the incredible, deep passion that is in the heart of God for the men and women who live in **HIS** world. *God SO loved the people of the world that he gave...* and he gave the most precious thing he could possibly give – his only begotten Son - that people in *his* world might find eternal life.

The earth is the Lord's, and when he created man he gave him responsibility to rule over it. When Adam and Eve sinned they allowed Satan to take over the rule that was rightfully theirs and so the Bible now refers to the evil one as the prince of this world.

But this doesn't mean that God has given up on his plans for his world – or for man to rule over it. By becoming truly man, Jesus could rightfully reclaim that right and through his death and resurrection he dealt with Satan, once and for all ... "*for only as a human being could he die, and only by dying could he break the power of the Devil*" (Heb 2:14 NLT).

When the Bible tells us not to love the world, it's not referring to God's world or to the people who live in this world, but simply to everything that emanates from the evil rule of Satan, the prince of this world. Our battle as Christians is not **against** the world, but against the evil powers that control what goes on in the world.

The reality is that our battle as Christians is actually **FOR** the world – for the day is coming when the kingdoms of the world will come under the rule of Christ (Rev 11:15). Every time we pray for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven, we are actually aligning ourselves with God's declared will and purpose – for his great eternal plan is to unite everything under the rule of Christ (Eph 1:10). **We're not called to opt out of the world, therefore, but to redeem it.** (See Rom 8:18-25.)

Have you wondered why God, in his supreme power, doesn't simply destroy the devil and bring in the rule of Christ with immediate effect? Surely God hates all the evil the devil perpetrates in the world even more than we do? So why not put an end to suffering once and for all?

The reason, I believe, is that **God loves people so much that he wants as many as possible to be saved.** (1 Tim 2:4)

God cannot bring the full force of his righteous judgment down on Satan without judging man also – and when he does that the day of salvation is over. God is passionate therefore about reaching the lost – his heart throbs with the urgency and importance of the gospel. Mission is not our idea but his.

We call ourselves evangelical Christians, but do we really share this passion of God's heart. In many parts of the world, believers *are* infused with this passion – at our AGM, Derek Copley shared with us how this is true in Central Asia. But in our comfortable Western culture, we have become lukewarm. We profess to believe in the power of the gospel to change lives – but we have not allowed our hearts to be infused with the Father's love for people in the world around us.

When it comes to being, like Jesus, a friend of sinners, most of us are too busy. God recently challenged me on this very point. A while ago, one of my neighbours invited me to come up to our local pub with him sometime for a chat and a drink. To my shame I realised that around a year had gone by and I'd never taken him up on this. I'd been too busy with "the Lord's work" (and everything else I was trying to fit into my hectic life) to be like Jesus and befriend my neighbour.

If Jesus had to choose between yet another church meeting or going to the pub with a neighbour, what would he do? His track record of eating and drinking with "sinners" (strongly criticised by the religious hypocrites of his day) leaves us in little doubt. I've begun to seriously pray that God will give me *his* heart for the people in *his* world. He loves to answer that prayer. But how about you? Are *you* bold enough to pray it?

Jonathan Wallis

LEAF is committed to the transformation of society and culture in the New Forest through evangelical Christians uniting together in prayer, worship, evangelistic activity, social action and speaking with a common voice to local government and media.

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EA revises its basis of faith

After a lengthy process of revision, the Evangelical Alliance has adopted a new Basis of Faith which will be officially incorporated into the Alliance's Memorandum and Articles of Association at its AGM on 14 September 2005.

Rev Dr David Hilborn, the Alliance's Head of Theology and Co-ordinator of the revision process, said after the Council vote: "I am delighted with the new Basis of Faith. It runs to roughly the same number of words as the previous version and maintains what was affirmed there, but manages more fully to reflect the witness of Scripture. The old version said nothing about the virgin birth, personal conversion, the ascension or the general resurrection. This covers all of those areas and says a good deal more about God's love and justice as well. It is expressed in clear and precise terms suited to the Alliance's ministry and mission in the 21st Century."

Joel Edwards, General Director of the Alliance, said: "The way our Theological Commission, Board and Council have worked together on this revision process is exemplary. Many people have participated in the process and there has been a lot of debate and re-working along the way, but it was great to see such unanimity when the final version was approved and adopted."

Dr Derek Tidball, Principal of the London School of Theology and Chair of the Alliance's Council, similarly commended the new text: "It is a real improvement", he said. "It elegantly expresses the essentials of Evangelical faith, and defines clearly what underpins the Alliance's ministry and mission."

Comment

This new basis of faith provides an elegant and concise summary of the basic tenets of our faith. Those revising it have done a great job, and it is good to have something so clearly expressed in modern language.

We need to remember, however, that what we believe, although very important, is not the **most** important thing. The greatest command of all is to love God with all of our being and to love our neighbour as ourselves (Mk 12:29-31). Without love, believing the right things is of no value at all (1 Cor 13). We will ultimately be judged by the fruit of our lives (Matt 7:20), not our doctrinal correctness.

Paul tells us strive first to maintain the unity of the Spirit in order that ultimately we may attain the unity of the faith (Eph 4). It doesn't work the other way round. It's great to have a clear statement of what we believe, but if we allow this to divide us from those who see things differently we've missed the point.

The Existing Basis of Faith

Evangelical Christians accept the revelation of the triune God given in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and confess the historic faith of the Gospel therein set forth. They here assert doctrines which they regard as crucial to the understanding of the faith, and which should issue in mutual love, practical Christian service and evangelical concern.

- The sovereignty and grace of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit in creation, providence, revelation, redemption and final judgement.
- The divine inspiration of the Holy Scripture and its consequent entire trustworthiness and supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct.
- The universal sinfulness and guilt of fallen man, making him subject to God's wrath and condemnation.
- The substitutionary sacrifice of the incarnate Son of God as the sole and all-sufficient ground of redemption from the guilt and power of sin, and from its eternal consequences.
- The justification of the sinner solely by the grace of God through faith in Christ crucified and risen from the dead.
- The illuminating, regenerating, indwelling and sanctifying work of God the Holy Spirit.
- The priesthood of all believers, who form the universal Church, the Body of which Christ is the Head and which is committed by His command to the Proclamation of the Gospel throughout the world.
- The expectation of the personal, visible return of the Lord Jesus Christ in power and glory.

The New Basis of Faith

We believe in...

1. The one true God who lives eternally in three persons—the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.
2. The love, grace and sovereignty of God in creating, sustaining, ruling, redeeming and judging the world.
3. The divine inspiration and supreme authority of the Old and New Testament Scriptures, which are the written Word of God—fully trustworthy for faith and conduct.
4. The dignity of all people, made male and female in God's image to love, be holy and care for creation, yet corrupted by sin, which incurs divine wrath and judgement.
5. The incarnation of God's eternal Son, the Lord Jesus Christ—born of the virgin Mary, truly divine and truly human, yet without sin.
6. The atoning sacrifice of Christ on the cross: dying in our place, paying the price of sin and defeating evil, so reconciling us with God.
7. The bodily resurrection of Christ, the firstfruit of our resurrection; his ascension to the Father, and his reign and mediation as the only Saviour of the world.
8. The justification of sinners solely by the grace of God through faith in Christ.
9. The ministry of God the Holy Spirit, who leads us to repentance, unites us with Christ through new birth, empowers our discipleship and enables our witness.
10. The Church, the body of Christ both local and universal, the priesthood of all believers—given life by the Spirit and endowed with the Spirit's gifts to worship God and proclaim the gospel, promoting justice and love.
11. The personal and visible return of Jesus Christ to fulfil the purposes of God, who will raise all people to judgement, bring eternal life to the redeemed and eternal condemnation to the lost, and establish a new heaven and new earth.