

2013 Annual Report

The Bible describes the Saviour's local church such as ours and such as yours as "the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Timothy 3.15). In picture language the pillar is that which supports the superstructure; the ground (or grounding) is that which stabilises a building, its foundation. Could there be a more noble or more important work in which to be engaged than to be supporting and upholding the truth as it is in Christ Jesus our Lord, the truth of the Gospel? Let our encouragement be great today knowing how wonderful our high calling is and how beneficial to mankind as it has been to ourselves. A local church should be outward looking to make the truth of the Lord Jesus Christ known far and wide. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5.16). It should be inward looking to ensure that it is fulfilling its role as the pillar and ground of the truth. Constant instruction in the faith and the reasons why it is what it is, does what it does and believes what it believes will ensure that it will continue to be such.

It would be a good study to take up a concordance and work through the New Testament references to "truth." As a taster, you would find such examples to meditate upon as, "The truth shall make you free," "full of grace and truth," Pilate's "What is truth?" The Lord Jesus Christ's, "Every one that is of the truth heareth me." There are those who "change the truth of God into a lie;" others who "hold the truth in unrighteousness". The expression "the truth of the gospel" is used more than once. Then there are, "speaking the truth in love" and "rightly dividing the word of truth." In the first 2 verses of 2 John "truth" occurs 3 times. May I encourage us all to be Bible students; students of the Truth.

I am afraid that when I preach so many sermons; when I exhort you to take up a concordance; when I exhort you to study the book of Proverbs (as I shall) with Bible in hand and looking up all the references; that your response will be as to Ezekiel, "And lo thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but they do them not" (Ezekiel 33.32). It's good entertainment to listen; interesting, but take no notice. As when choirs sing "the Messiah" but the words have no significance personally, the singing is everything; as when a newspaper article is read and noted, but no action taken. This is not to be the way with the children of God when they read scripture exhortations or hear sermons. "Faith cometh by hearing" (Romans 10.17) and that sort of "hearing" must be cultivated by us all as it is a unique feature of discipleship and does not come from our old nature.

We are currently studying Hebrews and have reached chapter 11 concerning faith and remaining faithful. We have passed chapter 10 which contains the words "not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but

exhorting one another: and so much the more as ye see the day approaching” (Hebrews 10.25). It is imperative to be diligent in our assembling together to sustain the local church, for the very reason that it is the pillar and ground of the truth whose influence must not wane nor its power diminish. Put another way, in the words of the Lord Jesus Christ, “Ye are the light of the world.” I entreat you all to join a church fellowship to which the Lord leads you precisely because it is the Lord’s appointed way to support and sustain Gospel truth, at a time when absolute truth of any kind is vehemently denied in order to support dissident lifestyles.

In the Lord’s Day morning ministry we are into the last chapter of John and, in accordance with my policy of expounding the four Gospels continually in order to keep our dear Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ constantly at the forefront of our thinking and devotion, will soon be returning, if the Lord permit, to Matthew. After Hebrews we may turn again to the book of Job. My midweek policy has been, for the most part, to attempt the more difficult books.

To meet the private study needs of certain friends I have been writing a commentary on Proverbs, attempting a chapter a week. In the course of studying that book if all the scriptural references are faithfully looked up and prayed over I am sure it will go a long way to keeping us grounded in our most holy faith. After Proverbs I have it prayerfully in mind to attempt Ecclesiastes. I should add for any of you involved in youth work that it would be good to go through the Proverbs; for many a young life is ruined before it is barely started by the things that are cautioned against in that mighty provision of the word of God. If you cannot access our website then I can make paper copies available to anyone interested; all in the interests of grounding us in the word of God, the scriptures.

By the church of the living God is not meant the building but the people. It is lovely, however, to have a place set aside to worship the Lord and you will enjoy joining us here. The building has been recommended for listing which, if upheld, would mean that repairs would be very costly. However, the building is not in its original state - as generation after generation has made alterations according to the need of the times as they saw fit under God; and while preservation was in their minds, to hand on to the next generation what they had received, conservation certainly was not. We shall see what God the Lord will do as we prayerfully await the result.

As to the Baptist church buildings of Suffolk (and Norfolk) Dr Tim Grass has produced an excellent, illustrated, book, entitled most appropriately “There my friends and kindred dwell.” It is recommended reading for the nostalgic among you. The 250 years of our friends at Wattisham has also been ably recorded by Janet Lovell in her well-researched book “All of Grace” and would be good to read, especially for those who have joined our churches recently without knowing their background history and for

whom it would be an enrichment of Christian discipleship to learn of those who have gone before us in the faith.

As we are a Baptist church it is worth mentioning that on Sunday, 2nd June it will be the 180th anniversary of the first baptism held in the church.

The local Middle schools were closed last summer and the church here at Friston was able to give a copy of the TBS Diamond Jubilee commemoration Bible to every leaver at Leiston Middle School. I can also recommend the new TBS Westminster Bible should any of you be ready to replace a worn out Bible or be upgrading to a copy with many cross references to aid you in your study.

The things we always do are our “bread and butter” and to say the same things year on year may strike as mere repetition in a report. Yet we do not take our worship lightly. Each service is for the Lord and we endeavour to conduct ourselves in worship as is befitting the worship of the living God. I began by quoting Paul’s passage about the church being the pillar and ground of the truth. I did not quote the words which immediately precede it. “That thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.” The Psalm (89.7) cautions us likewise, “God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him.” We have truly known the Lord’s presence as we have approached His presence reverently and in humble fear.

Week by week we teach our young ones; Ethan at Sunday School and the Monday Club at the manse. The bi-monthly evangelistic pastoral letters are still distributed, and the “wayside pulpit” still displays its Bible texts. We constantly pray the Lord’s blessing on each of these means of outreach. And for several years now we have been taking a houseparty to Foxley in Norfolk to come apart and rest awhile.

We regard the church website as a major means of outreach also. We would encourage you all to make frequent use of it, if you have the means of access. There is so much there to enrich you. Series of sermons, the Proverbs commentaries, and “Swift to its Close” (a selection of Bible verses with comments for those who are terminally ill). I would especially encourage you to access my two lectures given in 2011 on the AV; for those who use it (now that its usage is constantly being challenged) should know why it is good to use it; and those who use other versions might revisit their reasons once again and might well come to the conclusion that they have abandoned a greater translation of the holy scriptures for a lesser. Those lectures cover two widely different aspects. The one is entitled, “The transmission of the New Testament text of the AV” and the other “The AV - the noblest monument of English prose and devotion.”

Mention of the AV reminds me that we owe so much of it to the gifts the Lord gave to William Tyndale. My wife and I climbed to the base of his monument in Gloucestershire last week which commands a wonderful view over the river Severn and into Wales. There will be some of you, I know, who love long distance walking. The Tyndale monument stands on the Cotswold Way and would make a good excuse for choosing that walk – but not before you had read the opening two chapters of Tyndale’s biography by David Daniell which speaks at length about Tyndale’s early days in that location.

My aim in these annual reports is, of course, partly to record and partly to report; but mainly to reflect, for the encouragement of us all, on the things which belong to our brave and courageous stand as we continue in the truths of the Gospel against the wiles of the devil. May we take such an occasion as this to renew our devotion to the Saviour. When Peter was to be renewed, reinstated even, the Lord began the process with the words, “Lovest thou me?” (John 21.15-17). Let us renew our love to Him at this very service. The Pastors here, myself included - let us keenly respond to the Saviour’s injunction, given at the same time, “Feed my lambs,” “Feed my sheep.”