

# *The* **SCRIPTURE STANDARD**

*Pleading for a complete return to Christianity  
as it was in the beginning.*

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## **NONE GOOD BUT GOD**

The other evening at our congregational Discussion Group a sister raised an interesting question regarding the accuracy, or suitability, of a term quite commonly heard, viz. "A Good Christian". She wanted to know if this description was relevant or valid, and, if so, would the corollary of this be that there were also "Bad Christians". And would it not follow that if a person was a "bad Christian" -e or she would not in fact be a Christian at all? It is certainly true that we hear this kind of expression quite often, i.e. that so-and-so is "a very good Christian", or that such-and such an action was "not very Christian", or that so-and-so was far from showing "a Christian attitude" etc.

Before we begin to think in terms of "Good Christians" and "Bad Christians" we have surely got to understand what we mean by the word, and what constitutes a Christian. "Christian" is a designation that I, personally, don't like very much, and obviously it means all things to all men: excellently illustrated by the fact that Britain is quite often referred to as "a Christian country". Even in the religious world the word is much over-worked and has no certain meaning. Quite often the term is a blanket description for nice and compassionate people, especially if they are engaged in charitable endeavours. Even some of the men and women of the entertainment industry ('Pop Stars') who perhaps make no claim whatsoever to being even slightly religious, are described as fine Christian people, because they have collected vast sums for charitable projects in the Third World. By and large, people do not become Christians because they do good works: rather the reverse. Indeed some of the greatest philanthropists who ever lived were completely atheistic.

### **SPARSE MENTION IN N.T.**

And so, even in the religious world, this word "Christian" gets bandied about: Christian Church, Christian Brethren, Christian Ideal, Christian Ethic, Christian Principles, etc. etc. In view of all this, it seems incredible that the Early Church managed quite well **without the term** "Christian" for some fourteen years, and when the appellation was coined it certainly does not seem to have been produced by the apostles or the church members themselves. Originally it was applied to church members by people **outwith the church**, and was probably intended to be rather derogatory. Previously to the word being invented the church members used to describe themselves as **disciples, saints and brethren**, and, of course, **they continued to do so** even after the word 'Christian' appeared. We read (in Acts 11:26) that Barnabas was making so many converts at Antioch that he asked Paul to come and help him, and together for a whole year, they taught much people and greatly multiplied the church. It was at

**this point in time**, (about 44 AD) that we read that **“the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.”** Prof. William Barclay, says, on this verse, (Quote) “The word Christian began by being a nick-name. The people of Antioch were famous for their facility in finding jesting nicknames. The termination (-iani) means belonging to the party of. For instance, Caesariani means belonging to Caesar’s party. Christians means ‘These Christ-folk’. It was a half-mocking, half-jesting, wholly contemptuous nickname. But the Christians took that nickname and made it a name which all the world was to come to know” (Unquote). J. W. McGarvey (Notes on Acts) disagrees that it was ever a nick name because he thought there was nothing very belittling about it, but adds (Quote) “True, in the only later occurrences of it in the N.T., it appears as a name by which the disciples were called by others, rather than that by which they called themselves but it is only natural that in the epistles which are all addressed to Christians, other and more intimate titles should usually be employed.” (Unquote). As Brother McGarvey truly says in that short quote, the epistles were all addressed to “Christians” but is it not incredible that **the term is never used?** Paul in all his many epistles to a great host of brethren **never ever** employed the word ‘Christian’. Indeed the term appears **only three times in the entire N.T.** once as mentioned above: once where King Agrippa said to Paul **“Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian”** (Acts 26:28); and once where the apostle Peter said that if anyone was to suffer **“as a Christian”** he need not be ashamed (1 Peter 4:6). If the designation “Christian” was originated by the apostles, or by the church, for general application to church members it surely must be amazing that the word never appears in the entire N.T. (apart from those three special instances just mentioned). In the Bible Commentary (by Jamieson, Fausset & Brown) we read (Quote) “This name originated not within, but without, the church; not with their Jewish enemies by whom they were styled “Nazarenes” and “Galileans” (Ch. 24:5) but with the heathen in Antioch, and (as the form of the word shows), with the Romans, not the Greeks there (Olshausen). It was not, at first, used in a good sense (as Chap. 26:28 & 1 Peter 4:16 show), though hardly framed out of contempt (as De Wette, Baumgarten etc.) but as it was a noble testimony to the light in which the church regarded Christ; honouring Him as their Lord and Saviour, dwelling continually upon His name, and glorying in it — so it was felt to be too apposite and beautiful to be allowed to die.” (Unquote).

Without wishing to labour the point, it does seem most odd that, if ‘Christian’ was a name given by the church to themselves, or one generally approved of by the apostles, it is conspicuous by its absence from the pages of the N.T. **Paul** never wrote “to the Christians at Corinth, Ephesus or Galatia, etc.” but always “to the saints in Christ and faithful brethren”, or, sometimes, “to them sanctified in Christ, called to be saints”. He had unlimited opportunities to speak of the ‘Christians’ around him, but never used the word, even once; and, after all, he was at Antioch when the term was coined, and his epistles ranged in origin from 7-25 years thereafter. **Jude** wrote (some 25 years thereafter) “to them that are sanctified” and likewise never mentioned the word. **John** wrote (some 50 years thereafter) “to my little children” or “my beloved” and never mentions ‘Christians’. **James** didn’t write “to all the Christians scattered abroad” but “to his brethren” in the twelve tribes scattered abroad: and he too, never used the word ‘Christian’. **Peter**, who used the word once (in the context already mentioned) didn’t write “to all the ‘Christians’ scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, etc” but to “the elect” and “to those who have obtained like faith”. Thus we see Peter’s limit to his use of the term, (and his second epistle was some 23 years thereafter). Although nothing conclusive is claimed for this apparent oddity, it does seem to indicate that the term ‘Christian’ was not very common currency in the vocabulary of the apostles and Early Church.

### THE FIRST CHRISTIANS

Subject to the above proviso, I now use the term in describing the definition of a 'Christian'. The religious world would, of course, give us a hundred conflicting answers to the question "What is a Christian" but the best place (indeed the only place) for a sure definition is the N.T. In the Acts of the Apostles we have a great wealth of information as to how men and women, from all walks of life, Jews, Gentiles and Samaritans, converted to Christ and became members of His Church. Initially, on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:41) around 3,000 were immersed and became the nucleus of the Church in Jerusalem. The apostle Peter had preached to great throngs in the city, (showing who Christ really was and how He had fulfilled all Messianic prophecy in the O.T.). Peter spoke so forcefully that many were convicted and called out "What shall we do." Peter's reply, given then and still applicable today, was **"Repent and be baptised (immersed) every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit"**. (Acts 2:37). 3,000 obeyed. All subsequent conversions (and many are recorded in the Acts) followed precisely the same form, i.e. men having heard the true gospel; and having become convicted of their sins; decided to amend their careless ways by their repentance. They also publicly expressed their belief in Christ and started their new life in Christ with 'a clean slate' i.e. **by washing away their sins in the waters of baptism**. Even in the conversion of the apostle Paul himself, there was no deviation from this procedure, and in consequence of his repentance he was counselled by Ananias to **"arise, and be baptised, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord."** (Acts 22:16). Those, and only those, who opted to be "born again" in this way were added to the Church and entered the brotherhood of Christ: becoming 'Christians'. However, many refused the opportunity, as many still do today. Indeed, as we have seen, King Agrippa's reaction to the preaching of Paul was, **"ALMOST thou persuadest me to be a Christian"**, thus exercising his option **not** to be a Christian. Millions since are in the same position, **almost** persuaded, but lost.

### ADD TO YOUR FAITH

The question with which we started off was, of course, whether there were "good" Christians and "bad" Christians. The N.T. certainly talks about good seed, good tidings, good measure, good gifts etc. but never good Christians, or **good churches**, for that matter. Presumably no person, or no church, is wholly good or bad, but somewhere-in-between. We all have our strengths and weaknesses: we are all partly wise and partly foolish; partly generous and partly mean; partly enthusiastic and partly indifferent; partly militant and partly disinterested partly dependable and partly erratic, etc. Even Paul refers to the continual warfare within himself, that when he intended to do good he found himself doing the opposite. (Rom. 8:18). In the letters to the seven churches (Rev. 2 & 3) we see that the churches were, like people, and like the curate's egg (good only in parts). They were partly hot and partly cold: partly this and partly that: for some things, highly commended, for others, roundly condemned. None were described as good or bad, but all were advised and exhorted to become **BETTER**. In any case, Jesus Himself refused to be called 'good' and when the young rich ruler addressed Him as **"Good Master"** Jesus rejected the description and said, **"There is none good but One, and that is God."** (Matt. 19:17).

What becomes of Christians after conversion depends upon a whole mixture of circumstances. Firstly, it is not unknown for people to convert to please parents, to impress their boss; to seek to marry a church member or even to get a food parcel, etc., and so they may be 'still born', and not re-born. Some babes in Christ die early from malnutrition, or lack of help and encouragement – never receiving sincere milk much less strong meat. Some converted on a wave of emotion during a highly charged 'Campaign' and have cooled somewhat, for some churches make regular and rapid

conversions but lose members just as fast and remain the same size (like a bath with running taps but the plug hole open). Some have come from a 'Christian' background and are buttressed around with advice and support, while others have come from a really rough environment and have brought with them habits and prejudices. Some have tangled marital ties; some rescued from alcoholism, prostitution, drug-abuse and homosexuality. Surely much depends upon the point from which we start. Even **the twelve**, specially chosen by Jesus and who actually lived with Him for some years, observed all His miracles and heard all His words; were not wholly good: for one betrayed Him, one denied Him; all were upbraided for their unbelief and eventually all forsook Him and fled.

And so it would seem not so much a matter of good, or bad Christians, but of **BETTER** Christians. Christ is the model: He set the very high standard to be attained, and that does not leave much room for any complacency. Paul never described himself as a good Christian, but "as chief of sinners" and was concerned that having preached to others he, himself, might be castaway. There is always room for **improvement and growth**. "**GROW in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.**" (2 Peter 3:18). "**And besides this, ADD to your faith**" says Peter; "add such things as, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness and love." "**For if these things be in you and abound**" ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 1:5). We will never be 'good' but we can all try to be better.

EDITOR.

## GLEANINGS

*"Let her glean even among the sheaves." Ruth 2:15*

### I FOLLOW AFTER

"Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect; but I follow after."

(Philippians 3:12)

### WE QUOTE — L. EDWARDS

"I would have my Saviour with me, For I dare not walk alone;  
I would feel His presence near me, And His arm around me thrown.  
Then my soul shall fear no ill, While He leads me where He will;  
I will go without a murmur, And His footsteps follow still."

### RECOGNIZE YOUR IMPERFECTIONS

"Recognize your imperfections." We will be of little use for God or man if we go through life on the tiptoes of a fancied superiority. Paul did not do that. He was intensely practical. "Not as though I had already attained or were already perfect. Better by far to stand foursquare on the firm ground of experience, recognizing that while much ground has been gained, much remains to be captured."

A. Soutter.

### A MAN'S BEST DESIRES

"A man's best desires are always the index and measure of his possibilities; and the most difficult duty that a man is capable of doing is the duty that above all he should do."

Charles H. Brent.

### THAT HE MAY DO IT THROUGH YOU

"Cease trying to work for God and begin allowing God to do His work in you so that He may do it through you."

K.C.

**MORE THAN CONQUERORS**

“We cannot rise triumphant over any trial until we see the victory beyond. Nothing more commends the glorious Captain of our Salvation to the admiration and imitation of every suffering soldier in life’s battle, than the victoriousness of His Spirit. He is the triumphant Christ, and He is leading us on to be more than conquerors through Him that loved us.”

A. B. Simpson.

**GOD’S RICH PROVISION**

“There is no possible gift or grace in which we are deficient that is not stored in Christ, in whom the fulness of God abides. Did we but understand this, surely not a moment would elapse without our availing ourselves of God’s rich provision.”

F. B. Meyer.

**BE CAREFUL**

“Too much taken up with our work, we may forget our Master; it is possible to have the hands full and the heart empty.”

Adolphe Monrod.

**MORE WISE WORDS FROM W. RILEY**

“We are all workmen, each after his kind, servants of one master; and if God gives grace to use our opportunities as we ought, we may all enter, even now, into the joy of the Lord.”

“Ineffective depression is a kind of idleness, and I will kill it with industry.”

“I can understand that none of these things satisfies in itself, and that you may have ‘all things and abound,’ and yet crave something you cannot work for and earn.”

**ACTS AND FACTS**

ADOLPH SAPHIR, the eminent Hebrew Christian teacher, said: “If I were to live my life over again I would spend less time in service and more time in prayer.” “Pray without ceasing.” (1 Thess. 5:17). “In everything by prayer.” (Phil. 4:6).

Selected by Leonard Morgan.

**A CREED THAT NEEDS NO REVISION**

Several major denominations have revised, even re-written their creeds in recent years. Other groups are considering the same. The most notable of these projects has involved the revision of the historic *Westminster Confession of Faith* of the Presbyterian Church. The original document, being thoroughly Calvinistic and conservative, has grown distasteful to the modern leaders of that church. We who are New Testament Christians should thank God that we have a creed that needs no revision. It is just as relevant and truthful today as it was when issued by the holy apostles and prophets in the first century. Of course, I speak of the New Covenant of Jesus Christ, which is the final and complete revelation from God to man, and the only rule of faith and practice for the church of Christ.

**1. Our Creed can never be revised.**

Our Creed was written by an all-wise God. He, only was able to produce a document that would be suited for every man in every generation. Since its author is God, no man, nor group of men, is qualified to lift the pen to change a single point of its teaching. No spiritual question can arise that this heavenly document does not speak to. Hear Paul : “Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for re-proof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness: that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely, unto every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16,17). It was not the genius of the scripture writer that made our creed so excellent. Rather, David said: “The Spirit of Jehovah spake by me, and his work was upon my tongue” (2 Sam. 23:2).

2. **Our creed was “once for all delivered unto the saints”** (Jude 3). That is, it was final and complete. Mormons, Adventists and others believe in a continuing revelation, but true followers of Jesus accept their New Testament as God’s last word to man, that will stand unto Judgment Day. Some might argue that this leaves us disadvantaged, but the writers of our creed were guided into “*all the truth*” by the Holy Spirit of God (John 16:13). If we have in their writings all of the truth, what else could be given us by some so-called modern-day “revelation.”

3. **Our creed was sealed and dedicated by the blood of Jesus.** When the Saviour instituted the communion supper, “**he took a cup, and gave thanks, and gave to them saying. Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the covenant . . .**” (Matt. 26:27). He likely alludes to that time in the past when Moses sprinkled the book of the law with the blood of calves and goats, water, scarlet wool and hyssop saying, “**This is the blood of the covenant which God commanded to you-ward**” (Heb. 9:19,20). So Jesus’ blood, which flowed from his wounds on Calvary, sealed our creed. Can this be said of any other religious document in Christendom, however ancient and honoured? No one would dare make such a claim for their creed, discipline or manual.

4. **Our creed will stand forever.** After giving his great prophecy of the judgment of Jerusalem, the Lord sealed it with this solemn declaration: “**Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away**” (Matt. 24:35). Not only is this true of that one prophecy, but of every word Jesus wrote and commissioned his apostles to write. Such a creed stands no revision.

5. **Our creed is truth.** It is totally truthful, i.e., it admits of no error or short-coming. Also it is the sum total of spiritual truth. Jesus in his prayer to the Father said: “**Thy word is truth**” (John 17:17). It is true because it honours God and the Son as they should be honoured. It gives a true picture of man; made in the image of God, but a convicted sinner (Rom. 3:23). It gives us the true way of salvation through faithful obedience to Christ (Gal. 3:26,27). All the creeds of men make it a special point of emphasis to deny baptism its proper role in salvation. Our creed says: “**baptism doth also now save us**” (1 Peter 3:21). The world must learn that only truth can make us free (John 8:32).

6. **Our creed is universal.** It is suitable for all men in every society. There is but one faith (Eph. 4:5). Jesus charged his apostles to preach his gospel to every creature in all of the world (Mark 16:15). The needs of the aborigine in Australia and the sophisticated Bostonian are all fully met in the will of Jesus. With all the progress of technology, the needs of man are still the same as when the scriptures were written.

Our creed alone is mutually acceptable to every believer. Members of any denomination on earth can and will accept the scriptures as a standard of authority. But this cannot be said about any other creed ever written.

7. **Our creed would bring the “ecumenical unity”** men are seeking for, if they would lay aside all others and follow this creed exclusively. We know that this was the prayer of Jesus (John 17:20,21). The great mystery is why religious men have failed to see this. Or have they refused to accept it, preferring their own schemes and plans?

Can you visualise a great gathering of religious leaders from the many different denominations? The agenda calls for a forum to find an acceptable basis for unity. The Methodist would rise and suggest that his *Discipline* would surely be a fine basis for a united stance. But immediately the Baptist would object. Would not his *Manual* be better? Besides there are points in the Methodist creed that are at variance with the scripture. On and on it would go, for no sectarian would give up his creed for the creed of another sect. All feel that theirs is best. But could not a Christian stand and

plead with all to accept his creed, the New Testament of Jesus? Who would object to it? Upon what grounds would he object? Already it is held in honour by all representatives. Why have men not recognised and followed this simple, workable course? Ashley Johnson presents a fine illustration of this lesson in his book *The Great Controversy*.

8. **Our creed is a living message.** It never grows obsolete. Hebrews 4:12 says, “**The word of God is living and active . . .**” Any book that man writes is dated. It will soon be out-dated. Not so our creed. If any of today’s intelligentsia thinks that scriptures are out of touch with modern man, then let him write a better book that does as fine a job in meeting our needs.

9. **This creed is the sole standard** by which we will be judged (John 12:48). It is God’s message of salvation to lost men (James 1:21). To reject the creed of Christ is to reject the Author and the Father that sent Him (John 13:20).

Do we truly appreciate our creed which needs no revision? Are we telling the world of its virtues and blessings?

J. Waddey.

## FORGIVE

It sometimes seems that one of the most difficult abilities for Christians to acquire is that of forgiving brethren who have offended them. At the same time, it is absolutely essential that we must develop this ability if we are to be accounted as righteous in the eyes of our heavenly Father. Jesus does not even encourage us to ask God for forgiveness of our own sins while we are holding grudges against others.

It is highly significant that he included this principle, in the sample prayer that he gave to his disciples in response to their request that he teach them to pray. “**Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors**” (Matt. 6:12). That he was using the word “debts” primarily of unpaid spiritual or moral obligations is clear from the comment with which he immediately followed the prayer. “**For if ye forgive men their trespasses (sideslips, lapses or deviations, i.e., (unintentional) errors or (wilful) transgressions. — Strong), your heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses**” (vv. 14,15). This contains no loophole or escape clause. Only those who forgive will be forgiven. No alternate route to forgiveness is acceptable.

In Mark 11:25,26 we find the thought expressed in the form of a positive command, followed with a warning of what will happen if we ignore the command. “**When ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is heaven forgive your trespasses.**”

Nothing in the Scriptures suggest that our spiritual obligation to forgive those who offend us has any relationship to whether or not they deserve to be forgiven. Neither is there a limit placed on the number of times that the Lord expects to forgive them. When Peter indirectly suggested that he thought that it would be going to a generous extreme to forgive the same person seven times, Jesus replied, “**I say not unto thee, Until seven times; but Until seventy times seven**” (Matt. 18:22).

Are you expecting to be saved without having forgiven those that you feel have trespassed against you? As a precaution, it may be wise to make a long, thoughtful and prayerful appraisal of your attitude toward them.

The Apostle James pointed out an obvious but often ignored truth when he wrote, “**My beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath:**

for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God" (James 1:19,20). Wrath and forgiveness are not compatible. They simply cannot dwell in the same heart at the same time. It is impossible for them to agree on a course of action. Wrath says of its object: "Hurt, punish, humiliate, destroy!" Forgiveness says of the forgiven: "Comfort, strengthen, guide, save!"

Applying a pseudoscriptural euphemism to our anger in no way lessens its capacity to bring about evil results. Much that parades under the name of "**righteous indignation**" is only old-fashioned anger trying to make itself seem respectable in the Christian church. Indeed it is extremely difficult to find the term "righteous indignation" anywhere in the Bible. The indignation of God is several times mentioned, and we know that he is always righteous in his ways. Unhappily the same cannot be said of the indignation of men. Indeed when the word is used in connection with the emotions of men, it is accompanied by evil companions. "**Unto them that are contentious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil**" (Rom.2:8). Indignation, wrath, anger, or vindictive acts never work the righteousness of God.

"Be ye angry, and sin not; let not the sun go down upon your wrath: neither give place to the devil" (Eph. 4:26,27).

"If you are angry, do not let anger lead you into sin; do not let sunset find you still nursing it; leave no loophole for the devil" (N.E.B.)

"Never go to bed angry — Don't give the devil that sort of foothold" Eph. 4:26,27. (Phillips Translation) .

J. Phillips.

## FRIENDLY OBSTACLES

For every hill I've had to climb,  
 For every stone that bruised my foot,  
 For all the blood and sweat and grime,  
 For blinding storm and burning heat,  
 My heart sings but a grateful song —  
 These were the things that made me strong.

For all the heartaches and the tears,  
 For all the anguish and the pain,  
 For gloomy days and fruitless years,  
 And for the hopes that lived in vain,  
 I do give thanks, for now I know,  
 These were the things that helped me grow.

Tis not the softer things of life,  
 Which stimulates man's will to strive,  
 But bleak adversity and strife  
 Do most to keep man's will alive.

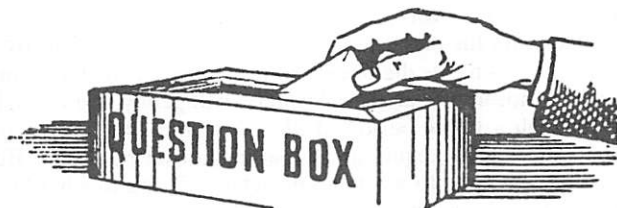
O'er rose-strewn paths the weaklings creep,  
 But brave hearts dare to climb the steep.

Author Unknown.

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In the Old Testament it was God for His people. That was wonderful. In the Gospels, it was Emmanuel, God with His people. But in the Acts of the Apostles and in the Epistles it is best of all, God in His people. God the Father for His people; God the Son with His people; and God the Holy Spirit in His people. What an amazing truth!






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Conducted by  
Alf Marsden

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“Ever since I was converted I have tried to live the Christian life to the best of my ability, but I am always conscious of my failings in this respect. My question is this: ‘Do you believe it is possible to live up to the high standard that the Bible sets?’”

Dear questioner, I believe this to be a cry from the heart, and one which could be echoed by many of us. Having said that, however, I must add that if the Bible is God’s Word to us, and if it contains, as we believe, God’s definitive statements regarding salvation and Christian living, then it would have been very remiss of Him to have set standards which He knew could not be achieved by human beings. In defence of our God and His Christ I believe that has to be said. I wonder, though, how the questioner has arrived at the point signified by the question. Is it because of a close perusal and study of the text of the Bible; is it because of observation of the lives of fellow-Christians; is it because of teaching given both in the Church, and the related literature of the Church; or is it a combination of these plus something else. I think we shall have to look at these points in some detail in order to ascertain whether or not the question **ought** to have been asked at all.

#### A STUDY OF THE TEXT

A study of the Bible can reap many blessings and, dependent on our response to its demands, can also present some pitfalls; but the pitfalls will be of our own making. If, for example, our study leads us to believe that we have achieved everything that God wants us to achieve, and that consequently we are the complete Christian, then we shall have **fostered ourselves** the sins of arrogance, pride, and self-sufficiency, and this will be reflected in our dealings and our debates with other people; the end result will be the degeneration of the Christian ethic. If, on the other hand, our study leads us to believe that God’s requirements of us are unachievable, then we shall have **fostered ourselves** the seeds of doubt and despair, and the end result will be the same as in the previous example. Either way, we shall have failed God because our Christian minds will have failed to develop a biblical perspective which will strike a balance between untempered arrogance and dark despair. The exhortation which says, “**Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth**” (2 Tim. 2:15) has not been met in the cases mentioned. So how do we get this biblical balance?

It is a well-known fact that a Christian is a ‘servant of God and Christ’; even the apostles classed themselves as such. A Bible student will not have travelled very far in his study before he realises with startling clarity that he is called upon to ‘serve’. We **must** serve, but it must be equally evident that there must be varying limits as to what we can achieve individually. The old saying, “They also serve who only stand and wait” is very true, and Paul makes this same point in 1 Thess. 1:9,10. All people are different, and this applies to Christians as well. We are different in stature, intelligence, capability, potential, and so we could go on, and it would be unreasonable to expect that **every** Christian could achieve **everything** set out in God’s Word. The saint who looks and waits with eager anticipation for the return of his Lord has his place with the one who busies himself round the church building; the saint who offers food, drink, and shelter in the name of the Lord to some needy soul has his place with the one who bestows great financial benefits to the church; the saint who struggles

with the text of the Bible but is able to whisper words of hope and encouragement to his fellow-saints has his place with the one who is able to preach fine sermons from the platform to large audiences. God needs the ones who in faith will launch out into the deep; He also needs those who, in the quiet backwaters, will gently and lovingly lead some distressed soul through a trying period of life. Yes, undoubtedly we are called upon to serve; that is a scriptural requirement that cannot be put aside. But we must develop a balanced judgment as to what can be achieved, and to what God expects us to achieve, taking into account the limiting conditions with which we may be beset. It is only when there is an unwillingness to serve in some capacity that the achievements of assemblies and individuals are nullified.

### FELLOW-CHRISTIANS

I have always believed that community-fellowship in the Church is one of the great gifts of God to His children, and when the Spirit of Christ permeates the community there is no doubt that it is. Conversely, some Christians quickly sense a spirit of non-community, and consequently the Church appears to them as a meeting-place with other Christians, rather than a trysting-place with God, His Christ, and fellow-saints. This can retard the spiritual progress of some Christians, and this will be reflected in the retardation of the witness of the Church. It may be that the root of this problem lies in the initial conversion to Christ of individuals.

Conversion to Christ can mean different things to different people. To some it can mean the respectability of 'joining' a church; to others — and I am thinking particularly about the 'ever-seeking and never finding the truth' fraternity — it is another stepping stone in the forlorn search for some sort of spiritual 'nirvana' on earth; yet others may see it as a 'platform of opportunity' in order to impress themselves on other Christians; some will undoubtedly see it for what it is and should be — a 'turning from' sin and a 'turning to' God, with a firm resolve to do whatever His Will dictates. At conversion, only God knows the heart and mind of the person concerned; the value-judgments of other Christians will come later when they have had time to observe what they consider to be the value of conversion. The tragedy is, of course, that when we make such value-judgments, we may make them from a base of obvious (though not obvious to us) imperfections **within ourselves**. This can be very confusing, because such judgments may be made on the basis of incomplete knowledge of the one judged, and done in the name of God whose Will we **ourselves** may not fully understand. So what does the confused Christian do?

First, I must carry out a rigorous self-appraisal. This is vitally important so that I may "see myself as others see me", but more importantly, that I may see myself as perhaps God sees me. After that I must study the Bible so that I may get a balanced perspective of God's Will, so that I may better understand the motives and actions of my fellow-Christians. Then I must devote **myself** positively to the 'upward call of God in Christ Jesus,' so that even though it may sadden me to see some of my brethren failing, it will not deflect me from the path I am resolved to travel.

### WHAT ABOUT THE TEACHING ?

Most of us are 'the taught' rather than 'the teachers', consequently we tend to be influenced by the spoken and written word. What I call 'opinionated comment' is quite acceptable in many areas of discussion, but when we preach and teach from the Bible I feel quite strongly that opinionated comment should be replaced by interpretational skill, otherwise we might have an imbalance of understanding on the part of the hearer if the teacher has an imbalanced perspective of the subject matter taught. Let me give one or two scriptural examples.

When Jesus chose His initial disciples He called upon them to forsake everything and follow Him; they did just that. He also told the rich, young ruler to give everything he had to the poor, and follow Him; He went away sorrowing. Are we then to teach that the universal rule for all time is that the Christian, if he has to be an **acceptable** Christian, must give away everything that he has in order to follow Jesus? I think not. The **balanced** teaching is that many Christians in N.T. times had houses in which they met; houses are possessions, and if the above-mentioned rule had applied, then those houses would have had to have been sold and the proceeds given into the common treasury. Or take the case of Ananias and Sapphira relative to the sale of the piece of land; Peter said to Ananias, "**Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power**" (Acts 5:4).

The N.T. abounds with examples of balanced teaching. The rich are not to suddenly become poor, but to use their riches for the general good; slaves are not exhorted to suddenly leave their masters when they become Christians but rather to serve as Christians; husbands are not now to leave their wives and vice versa; so we could go on. I wonder how much heartache has been caused by young Christians being told they must leave their earthly parents before they can even begin to live the Christian life properly. Why do some teachers make the living of the Christian life almost impossible by insisting on things which God has never insisted on? Small wonder that many sincere Christians end up in near-despair because of what they consider to be their inadequacies.

So, dear questioner, do not despair. The demands of God, though far reaching, are not impossible to achieve. Read the Bible and study it; look to God's standards and not to man's, even though the men be Christians; and be like the Bereans; examine everything you are taught in the light of God's Word. Remember, the commendation of Jesus was given to those who fed, clothed, and took in strangers, and visited the sick. There is nothing too mind-bending and difficult in that, is there?.

(All questions please, to Alf Marsden, 20 Costessy Way,  
Winstanley, Wigan. WN3 6ES.)

## SCRIPTURE READINGS

May 5	Ecc. 7:1-20	Luke 12:1-21
May 12	1 Kings 0:10-22	Luke 12:23-40
May 19	Ecc. 11:1-12:8	Luke 12:41-59
May 26	Isa. 1:1-20	Luke 13:1-21

### HELL

We read "**But I will forewarn you whom you shall fear: Fear Him who after he has killed, has the power to cast into hell; yea I say unto you, Fear Him.**" Hell here in the Greek is **Gehenna**. W. E. Vine has written: "It represents the Hebrew **Ge-hinnom** (The Valley of Tophet) and a corresponding Aramaic word; it is found twelve times in the N.T. eleven of which are in the Synoptists, in every instance as uttered by the Lord himself."

The Valley of Hinnom today is a beautiful spot in central Jerusalem, but in past history it was far from that. In fact, it was in this valley where those who worshipped Moloch the fire-god burned their children in the fire as an offering to him. Josiah had stopped that impious worship and had made the Valley of Hinnom desecrated territory (2 Kings 23:10). Later, it became the official rubbish dump, the public incinerator of Jerusalem. One writer has pointed out: "It smouldered continuously and in it loathsome species of worm bred and multiplied." It is no surprise, therefore, that God used the term **Gehenna** to describe the state of eternal punishment.

Alexander Campbell wrote: "This final judgment and 'perdition of ungodly men' is set forth by the Lord Himself, as well as by His apostles, in the clearest

and strongest terms and in boldest and most appalling imagery which human speech and human knowledge can afford. Indeed, to place this awfully sublime and glorious day in full array before the perceptive powers of man is impossible. The best efforts have exhausted the powers of nature in all her wonted energies. John, in his sublime visions of the last acts of the great drama of human existence, says, "I saw a great white throne, and Him that sat on it, from whose face earth, and sky fled away, and there was found no room for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is called the Book of Life; and the dead were judged out of the things that were written in those books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and the grave gave up the dead which were in them: and they were judged everyone according to his works; and death and the grave were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.' Surely, 'It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God.'"

#### THE PARABLE OF THE RICH FOOL

At present, I am busily engaged in the study of the subject : "Wealth, Riches, Poverty, etc.," especially as found in God's revelation. I have marked in one Bible every passage of Scripture which refers or alludes to these topics. I have learnt a great deal already especially from the O.T. Luke 12:13-34 has been highlighted from the N.T. Jesus here made some penetrating comments. For example, "Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consists not in the abundance of the things which he possesses (12:15)." "And seek not what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be you of doubtful mind. For all those things do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knows that you have need of these things. But rather

seek you first the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you." (12:29-31).

The parable of the Rich Fool has a sub-title in one of my books: "The Folly of Worldliness" How true! The folly was rooted in laying up treasure for himself in this world and not being rich toward God (12:21). In my twenty-four years as a banker I have seen many who have emulated the Rich Fool. One particular customer comes to mind, who is worth tens of thousands of pounds, but can only think of earthly treasure and has little time for anything else — and that includes clothing himself properly. He can tell you the details of all the interest rates offered by the multitudinous financial institutions and would unhesitatingly move his money for an extra quarter of a per cent return. He and all like him should hearken to these words of the Master : "You fool, this night your soul shall be required of you: then whose shall these things be, which you have provided?" (12:20)

#### TRUTH CAUSES DIVISION

Jesus said: "Suppose you that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, No; but rather division: for from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three. The father shall be divided against the son and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter and the daughter against the mother; the mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law."(12:51-53). Christianity is a divine benevolent and veritable institution. It has at its heart, of course, the person Christ Jesus. He came with tough demands. Again He said for example: "He that loves father and mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."(Matt. 10:37). Family ties should not hinder anyone from serving Jesus. Albert Barnes wrote: "Christ must be loved supremely, or He is not loved at all. If we are not willing to give

up all earthly possessions and forsake all earthly friends, and if we do not obey Him rather than all others, we have no true attachment to Him."

Actually, what Jesus was teaching here was in accordance with Jewish traditions of the day regarding the times of the Messiah. For example, in Sanhedrin fol. 97, it is said: "In the age in which the Messiah shall come, the young men shall turn the elders into ridicule; the elders shall rise up against the youth, the daughter against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and the men of that age shall be excessively impudent; nor shall the son reverence his father." So by these remarkable sayings Jesus showed them that He was the promised Messiah.

#### THE STEWARDSHIP OF LIFE

The dictionary defines a steward as "one called to exercise responsible care over possessions entrusted to him." All Christians are stewards of God and have as their example the apostles of Christ, who were special stewards of the Master.

All saints are saved to serve. Paul encouraged the early disciples to "walk worthy of the vocation wherewith you are called" (Eph. 4:1). He spoke of "vocation" and not "vacation."

A key word for every steward is watchfulness. "Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord when He comes shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them sit down to meat, and will come forth to serve them" (12:37). Paul later wrote to the Thessalonian brethren: "Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober" (1 Thess. 5:6). John in the Revelation letter penned this statement: "Behold, I come as a thief, blessed is he that watches and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame" (16:15). These passages show the importance of labouring for the Master. Personally, I believe that the Christian is saved by faith at work. Did not James say "Yes, a man may say." You have faith, and I have my works:

show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works" (2:18). Also: "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also" (2:26).

#### REPENTANCE

Jesus preached repentance. What is repentance? Alexander Campbell wrote: "Repentance is an effect of faith: for who that believes not that God exists can have 'repentance towards God?' Repentance is sorrow for sins committed; but it is more. It is a resolution to forsake them; but it is more. It is an actual 'ceasing to do evil and learning to do well.' This 'repentance unto life' or what is truly called reformation."

These Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices, and the eighteen, upon whom the tower of Siloam fell (13:1-4), were no worse sinners. Jesus said, than the rest "Except you repent you shall all likewise perish" (13:3,5). A number of commentators see in this statement a foretelling of the destruction of Jerusalem. Adam Clarke commented: "This prediction of our Lord was literally fulfilled. When the city was taken by the Romans, multitudes of the priests, etc., who were going on with their sacrifices, were slain and their blood mingled with the blood of their victims; and multitudes were buried under the ruins of the walls, houses and temple."

God still, of course, seeks repentance from sinners. It is a command of the gospel. Paul's statement to the Athenians is as relevant today as it was two thousand years ago: "... but now (God) commands all men everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30).

Ian S. Davidson, Motherwell.

## OBITUARY

**Tranent :** It is with regret that we report the passing of our sister Mary Sneddon, aged 86 years. Sister Sneddon has been a faithful member of the church at

Tranent for a great number of years, and for the past two years has been confined to hospital. She was always a very regular attender of our meetings and even while in hospital took an interest in the church and the members. Our thoughts are with her family and we commend them to the Lord.

Brother James Sinclair (Senr.) officiated at the funeral service assisted by Bro. Mark Plain.

J. Colgan, Sec.

## NEWS FROM THE CHURCHES

**Slamannan District:** The Quarterly Mutual Benefit Meeting took place on Saturday, 2nd March, in the meeting-house at Dennyloanhead. A goodly number enjoyed the usual warm reception at Dennyloanhead and proceedings began with a lovely tea. The meeting was ably chaired by Bro. John Wilson (Newtongrange) and the speakers were Bro. David Chalmers (Dalmellington) and Bro. Jack Nisbet (Haddington). Both speakers introduced the subject for that day, which was "In what way were the Apostles special and why can we expect none today."

As usual, after the speakers had opened up the subject, there was one hour's free discussion from the body of the hall, and, as usual, a great many interesting points and questions were raised (more questions than answers: as always).

Before parting, in the evening, tea was again greatly appreciated. A very enjoyable time in fellowship was had: in conversations and discussions with one another, on the Lord's work. God willing, the next meeting will be in Tranent, on 18th May, at 4.00 p.m., when the Chairman will be Mark Plain (Senr.), and the speakers will be John Colgan, and John Kneller (all from Tranent): the subject "Should Christians participate in war.?"

Harry McGinn (Sec.).

**Motherwell:** The church at Motherwell is pleased to report the baptism of Ronald Hamilton, husband of our sister Janette Hamilton. Ronald, who is a retired schoolteacher, had been attending the meetings for a number of years and had decided on the evening of the 14th of February to identify himself with the death, burial and resurrection of the Master after prayerful consideration and a discussion or two with the brethren. Ronald is a most welcome addition to our membership and we pray that he will be abundantly blessed in all his labours with us. We are a happy family at Motherwell and Ronald's commitment to Christ has made us all even happier. We continue to work and pray for further responses to the gospel.

William Purcell, Secy.

## COMING EVENTS

### Kirkcaldy Social

Saturday, 6th April, at 3.30 p.m.

Speaker: Joe Nisbet

### August Mission (Kirkcaldy)

12th-16th: Holiday Bible School.

14th-18th: Mission with M. Gaunt as Speaker.

### Newtongrange Social

(For your Diary)

October 12th 1991

at 4.00 p.m.

Details later

Joe Currie, Sec.

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The only difference between stumbling blocks and stepping stones is the way we use them.

A fault which humbles a man is of more use to him than a good action which puffs him up.

The opportunity of a lifetime must be taken during the lifetime of the opportunity.

It was never loving that emptied the heart, nor giving that emptied the purse.

## GHANA REPORT

At the time of preparing this report (6th March 1991) the Ghana Appeal has raised, to date, £18,786.54p.

On the 4th March £2,850 was sent to Bill Cook in Kumasi with the instruction to use it in the following way:-

Medical Aid £1,252.22

General Fund £1,067.28

(*Money not specified to be used with discretion*)

Roofing Fund £ 160.50

Eye Care £ 100.00

Bibles £ 100.00

Seeds £ 100.00

Building Fund £ 70.00

Bill Cook has arrived safely in Ghana and has rented a house in Kumasi to stay in. He was requested to pay one year's rent in advance which must have been a shock to him, as you can well imagine.

I have been approached on a number of occasions and asked how Bill is being supported in Ghana. Bill's heart has been in Ghana since his four week visit in 1989 to report on the situation out there. Bill has paid his own return fare to Ghana and hopes to live and work with the brethren there for one year, living off his pension. No part of the appeal money is assisting Bill.

All clothes and spectacles received to date, were sent to Bill for distribution on 4th March. The parcel was filled to the U.K. limit of 10 kilos.

I was hoping to have information on the progress of the work for this issue of the *Scripture Standard* but Bill has had to spend some time finding a suitable place to live and arrange to have

furniture made, etc. It certainly brings a point home to me; i.e. the depth of Bill's commitment, when I think of the furniture to fill his empty, rented house being hand-made.

Bill preached in Kumasi, morning and evening, the first Lord's Day in Ghana and the following Lord's Day he spent in Accra with David and Sharon Arku Mensah. Sharon met Bill at the airport on arrival.

Please remember the brethren and the work in Ghana in your prayers. Many thanks indeed to "I.M.B." for the cheque (for £20) received 18/2/91.

G. Pearson.

## GHANA APPEAL

Until I know of a specific need in Ghana I will simply say if anyone wishes to send money to Ghana to help in the work please send it to me at the address below and state your particular wish on how the money should be used, i.e., for gospel work, medical aid, cement, roofing fund, building materials or eye care. There is a need for each of these individual past appeals to be "topped up" and the brethren in Ghana certainly appreciate it. Cheques should be made out to:- Graeme Pearson (Ghana Appeal) and sent to —

Graeme Pearson

13 Fairways

Dunfermline

Fife KY12 0DU

Tel (0383) 728624

(P.S. Letter just received from Bill Cook stresses great need for **medical help** and assistance. More details later).

Do not consider any vice trivial, and so practise it: do not consider any virtue trivial and so neglect it.

Chinese Proverb.

Life is real! Life is earnest, and the grave is not its goal,  
Dust thou art, to dust returnest, was not spoken of the soul.

Longfellow.

Truth is tough. It will not break, like a bubble at a touch: Nay you may kick it about all day, like a football, and it will be round and full at evening.

O. W. Holmes.

## GOING TO CHURCH ?

1. The church and the church **building** are two different things. Carefully read 1 Tim. 3:15 and give over saying "I am going to the church" or "This is the Lord's house" or "The House of the Lord" when you are speaking about the meeting place.
2. Jesus said "I will build *my* church.  
The apostles referred to it as the church of the Lord, the church of God, the churches of Christ, the churches of God.  
Peter never had a church.  
Paul never had a church.  
Why would you speak of "your church," "my church," when you cannot have a church?
3. Alexander Campbell did not start the church of Christ. He was not the first to set it forth even in his own generation. James O'Kelly was preaching the truth concerning Christ and His church in 1794; Abner Jones was doing the same in 1800; Barton W. Stone in 1804.  
Alexander Campbell was not baptised until 1812.  
All these men were zealous proclaimers of the New Testament truth, but none of them started a church.

(From "The Young Christian")

## TWENTY PREACHING FAULTS

**Faults in Sermon Delivery.**

- (1) Unclear speech. (2) Unrefined speech habits. (3) Wordiness. (4) Habit of explaining the obvious. (5) Over-emphasis, mistaking noise for sense. (6) Failure to give colour, expression, and meaning to the spoken word.

**Faults in Sermon Construction.**

- (7) No Subject - no object. (8) No cumulative organisation of ideas. (9) lack of imaginative treatment. (10) Lack of factual background.

**Faults of Personality.**

- (11) Sanctimoniousness. (12) The Apologetic attitude (Mr. Milk toast in the pulpit). (13) The Pontifical attitude. (14) Negative Mindedness (Dr. Protestant gone to seed). (15) The frivolous attitude (The story telling parson). (16) The One Track Mind (Generally the preacher with a pet peeve).

**Worst Faults of All.**

- (17) Lack of gospel content. (18) Lack of relevance. (19) Lack of love. (20) Lack of sincerity.

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