

The SCRIPTURE STANDARD

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

Vol. 67 No. 8

AUGUST, 2000

WORDS, LETTER AND SPIRIT

This morning's newspaper highlights something which has been growing over the last few years - "political correctness". Quite often, when we see what is happening in this country we wonder if everybody has gone mad. A female police sergeant was awarded £500,000 in damages by a court yesterday, as compensation for her claim of sexual harassment at work, and the trauma she suffered, especially by a remark from a Scotland Yard Officer "that she was very intelligent for a woman". One wonders how we all managed to survive the "trauma" of the things said to us during our working lives. A few days ago, a business firm was refused permission to advertise for staff who were "keen and enthusiastic" on the grounds that this might reflect badly on those who might not be considered keen or enthusiastic. We might say that the world has gone mad, but we are no longer allowed to use words like "mad" or "crazy" as this might reflect badly on those with mental-health problems.

Remarks which have always been part of the "give and take" of ordinary conversation are now no longer politically correct or acceptable. A College in Stockport, Greater Manchester, has just completed a list of 59 potentially offensive words and phrases which they have incorporated into a Course of "Equal Opportunities Awareness", and insist that the continual use of such words could lead to staff dismissal, or students being expelled. A few examples on the list include "Ladies and gentlemen" (this has class implications): "Mrs." (may give offence): "Man in the street" and "Manmade" (what about women?): "Black look," or "Blackmail" (negative use of black): "Mixed race" (racial): "Handicapped" (historically meant cap-in-hand beggars): "Normal couple" (what is normal?): "Slaving over a hot stove" (minimise horror of slave trade): "Subnormal" (once used medically but now offensive): "The deaf" (hearing-impaired is better). Space is limited but these few examples may give readers a rough idea of what the other 48 objections are like, and indicate coming trends of political correctness. "Section 28" has just been abolished in Scotland, against the wishes of most of the population, because of its alleged political incorrectness: i.e. because it prohibited the promotion of homosexuality in schools and was thus deemed to discriminate against homosexuality. Even the request that Sect. 28 might be replaced by legislation in support of the family unit, and marriage, was rejected. The word "marriage" was deemed to be politically incorrect as it would reflect badly on those parents who were unmarried. And so, previously common and innocent words are now offensive, and an embarrassment, because of how society now lives.

MISUSE OF LANGUAGE

Words constitute language, and language constitutes one of the main differences between man and the animal kingdom. Without language it would be difficult, if not impossible, to give expression to human feelings, thoughts, emotions or ideas. Language greatly facilitates communication amongst mankind and words allow us to make our wishes and our intentions clear to one another but, unfortunately, language can be used just as effectively to mislead and confuse. Words can, and are, used to conceal facts just as often as to express truth: ranging from a blatant lie to a terminological inexactitude. Since the televising of transactions in the House of Commons it is quite obvious that politicians use language to disguise truth, or lies, and to cloud an issue rather than clarify it: so much so that we are now so cynical as to rarely believe anything politicians say. No one seems to be exempt, whether in politics or religion, and those guilty of verbal 'cover-ups' range from American Presidents to clergymen of all denominations: for although the Bible has been unchanged for the last 2,000 years, men abuse its simple language and very few see it alike. Even the translators of the KJV, as far back as 1611, said that, in their work on the translation, "they had shunned the obscurity of the Papists" (a reference to the then recent Catholic Rheims Version which, they claimed, was intentionally full of obscure words) "whereof their translation is full, and that of purpose to darken the sense, that since they must needs translate the Bible, yet the language thereof, it may be kept from being understood." So here we have an accusation from the learned translators of the KJV that the Roman Catholic Church purposely made their Rheims Version of the Bible obscure so that the common people would not readily understand it.

POLITICAL INCORRECTNESS IN RELIGION

Even in the religious world there are "politically incorrect" words and although Jesus used them they are rarely heard from the pulpits. "Sin" is not mentioned much, and it is not considered "nice" to talk of people as being "sinners". Some denominations have even banned the term "living in sin" as it would embrace such a large segment of the population. It is deemed "old-fashioned" to talk of people being "saved" and positively antiquated to talk of "Satan", "The devil", "Hell", "Judgement" and "Damnation". Such "fire-and-brimstone" talk has no place in an educated society. Some say that the term "Christian" is also politically incorrect, in that it infers that others are not Christians; and to call a church the "church of Christ" infers that others are not Christ's church. Obviously Christ and the apostles were quite unaware of such technicalities and were quite uninhibited in their reference to sin, sinners, Satan, Devil, Judgement, damnation, Christians (even Saints), Church of Christ, etc. And so whereas society would like to ban inconvenient and embarrassing words, their use in the scriptures merely throw them unto much stronger relief.

THE LETTER AND THE SPIRIT

Certainly words are of vital importance and must match the thoughts to be conveyed. Montaigne said, "The word is half his that speaks, and half his that hears it." Just as there is many a slip between cup and lip, there is, quite apart from political incorrectness, many a failure in spoken communication. Mark Twain said, "In Paris they simply stared at me when I spoke to them in French: indeed I never did succeed in making those idiots understand their own language." So much for Mark Twain's command of the French language, but certainly the spirit of the message is not always matched by the letter.

And so, for whatever the reason, sometimes the spirit and the letter never quite

synchronise. As we can imagine, God, In His eternal word, has never had any difficulty in clothing the spirit of His ordinances in the right words. David says, **"The law of Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever; the judgements of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned and in keeping of them is great reward."** (Ps. 19:7-11).

The apostle Paul was, of course, quite familiar with this elusive disparity between the spirit and the letter, and had occasion to take issue with the Christians at Corinth on the matter: (2 Cor. 3:6). Paul, in reply to some criticism from the Corinthians declared that God had made the apostles, **"able ministers of the New Testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit, for the letter killeth but the spirit giveth life."** Probably no remark made by Paul has been so badly mishandled or misapplied. There appears to be a widely held belief amongst theologians, and Christendom, that God's word is 'fairly flexible' and that anyone who intends to comply with it strictly, and entirely, is bent upon applying 'the letter of the law', without much regard to the spirit of it. For instance, if a man insists upon observing the ordinances of God precisely in the form of their original appointment, such as, say, the ordinance of Baptism, or the Lord's Supper, he would be accused by some of contending for 'the letter of the law: the letter that killeth'. In the meantime, those who approach those ordinances loosely would explain that they are seeking the spirit of the ordinance and are not so much concerned with the letter. They would say, "What do the mechanics of the actual baptising matter as long as we sincerely want to follow our Saviour? Sprinkling, pouring or immersion: what difference will it really make? Surely God will be as happy with the one as the other?" This, I think, is quite a fair representation of the attitude amongst the denominations, and those who advocate an exact application of the scriptures would certainly be regarded as sacrificing the spirit in the interests of the letter. The same is true in nearly every aspect of the denomination scene, whether it be vestments, instrumental music, clergy, women elders and preachers, etc. etc. **"The spirit of the law is that the Church should have government: so the letter should not be allowed to get in the way. If we can't get male elders then God will be just as pleased with women elders, as long as the Church has government. If we can't get male elders with all the qualifications then surely if a man has most of the qualifications, that should do nicely."** These are the kind of remarks we commonly hear in justification of all manner of religious innovation: in a bid to offset the spirit of the ordinance against the letter.

THE GLORY OF MOSES EXCEEDED

It certainly would be wrong for us to be concerned with the method of baptising, or the distribution of the elements on the Lord's Table, that we lost the spirit of these ordinances: but surely that does not mean that we can substitute our method for God's.

Closer examination of Paul's remarks (2 Cor. 3:7), however, show that he was not suggesting a difference between spirit and letter in God's word, but was contrasting **two differing religious systems**: the Jew and the Christian. He was relating the N.T. to the O.T. In stating that **"the letter killeth but the spirit giveth life"** Paul went on to say, **"But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not steadfastly behold the face of Moses for the**

glory of his countenance, which glory was to be done away. How shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious. For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory." And so clearly Paul is not relating the spirit to the letter within the same ordinance, but contrasting two very different "ministries", the "ministry of condemnation" (the Law of Moses) and the "ministration of the spirit" (the gospel of Jesus Christ). **"For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ."** (John 1:17).

The Law of Moses, glorious as it was, could only condemn the guilty; it could not save them. Paul here identifies what he calls **"the ministration of death"** - it was that **"written and engraven on stones"** i.e. the ten commandments. The Mosaic law prescribed penalties (including the death penalty): not pardon. Besides, no one ever complied with all the Law, and was, therefore, guilty of all, for James (2:10) reminds us **"that whosoever shall keep the whole law and offend in one point, he is guilty of all."** Barnes says. "A law which contains a provision for the pardon of offenders, and permits them to escape, would be burlesque in legislation." That's what Paul meant by "the letter that killeth." The law was in letter only and its effect was to produce a sense of guilt, danger, condemnation and a deeper sense of sin. Even in Christ's day the Jews applied themselves to an exact observance of the Law with cold formality: and entered little upon its real meaning. The **"ministration of the spirit"** (the gospel of Christ) is so different, of course. Whereas the letter killeth: the spirit giveth life. The law was but our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ and in His gospel we find not death and condemnation, but life and pardon. Jesus saves. The Law condemned: the gospel pardons. The first introduction of Moses' Law killed 3,000; at the first preaching of the gospel 3,000 were saved. In Christ we are reconciled again to God and have the promise of everlasting life. God's will is no longer engraven on tablets of stone but is enshrined in the hearts of men. Paul could say God's grace is now manifest **"by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel."**

Paul's other purpose (or one of his purposes) in saying these things was not so much to observe that quite often the spirit of a law is not quite matched by the letter, but rather was to stress to the Corinthian Christians that they should take the gospel, and those who brought the message to them, more seriously. If man's words are important: God's are more so. Paul reminds us, here, that God sent even "the ministration of condemnation" into the world with **great glory**, insomuch that Moses' face shone with such dazzling radiance that none to could venture near him. Paul argues that the coming into the world of "the ministration of the spirit" was also attended with great glory: with **"much more"** glory in fact, than that given to Moses and that the gospels work (and the workers) deserved better attention and greater respect.

Paul, and the others, in preaching the glad tidings, were God's chosen vessels and the only channel through whom the words of life would come, and **God's glory** crowned their work and their words. Perhaps this should make us, in this age, think similarly, with regard all work in the Lord's vineyard as a great honour and of paramount concern. **Words are important:** especially the "wonderful words of life." May we be encouraged to make them more widely known and rejoice that whereas "the letter that killeth" has gone, Christ's spirit of Life remains.

SURPASSING . . .

The effectiveness of a speaker is best determined by the kind of **impact** he has upon those who listen. As Peter finished his sermon on the day of Pentecost those who heard were "**cut to the heart.**" His lesson had a very obvious impact. I know many times I have sat at the feet of great teachers and have been deeply moved at the message. The Master Teacher was Jesus. The things He said and the lessons He taught had impact. His wisdom left His fiercest enemies speechless, the over-confident humble, the sinful aware of their worthlessness, the defeated and hopeless with a revived spirit . . . There was not a man, no matter what his situation that Jesus was not able to touch in some way.

What a powerful teacher He was! But what is the impact of His lessons on us today? Unfortunately, it is not the same. The impact is not even the same as it was a few years ago when we first opened God's word and began to read. We have become far *too familiar* with the Bible and the powerful blows of Jesus' teaching leave little affect on our hardened hearts.

Jesus taught in parable in Matthew 13 that finding the kingdom would be like a man who finds a treasure in a field. When he finds it he goes and sells all that he has to buy the field. Or, like a man who finds a great pearl which he has been searching a lifetime for. He sells all that he has to buy it. Those lessons taught how valuable the kingdom of God should be to us - so valuable that we'd sell all we have to get it. No doubt those lessons had an impact on those who heard them from Jesus' lips. They scratched their heads wondering, "What could be so valuable that I'd give up everything to have."

A kind of apathy fills our church buildings these days. We read the exact words that Jesus uttered - the kingdom will mean so much to us we will sell everything to have it - but the stinging impact is gone. And, we do not live every moment as if the kingdom and the eternal life it brings are worth everything we have. What should eternal life and the kingdom of God mean to us? How can we make our salvation more sure?

One of the best ways to make eternal things more sure is to simply realise the greatness of what we have. Paul used a word to describe the greatness of what we have in Christ; that word was "*surpassing.*" Surpassing means to "transcend the reach of, the capacity of, the powers of." Paul knew that what he had in Christ was not normal, but it was surpassing. Our salvation can be made more sure if we can realise to a greater extent the impact of what God offers and to us . . . the "**surpassingness**" of what we have in Christ. Let's look at three instances in which Paul used the word, "surpassing."

SURPASSING WORTH

Paul wrote in Philippians 3:8, "**Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord**" (RSV). If we are going to make our salvation more sure, we need to realise the worth that transcends our reach, transcends our powers and capacities. Paul knew that the value of his life in Christ could not be measured in a "normal" way. Its value transcended any known method of measuring. In verse 7 he says it meant so much to him he counted **everything** as loss for the sake of Christ. He follows that in the last part of verse 8 by saying that he had suffered the loss of all things and he gladly counted them as "refuse" for the sake of knowing Christ. His most prized earthly possession was nothing but trash in comparison with the value of his life in Christ. Salvation is going to be for the person who realises the surpassing worth of Christ.

It is often strange and shocking to see the value that some attach to things. Some

take care of their car better than they take care of their families. Some love their family pet, the dog or cat, more than they love their fellow man. We can get more excited about telling someone of the football game we saw than the Saviour that saved our souls eternally. Several times a year I read in the paper where someone sold a piece of junk for pennies, which turns out to be a very valuable object. Not long ago I read of a boy who was collecting rocks, was walking along somewhere in the Rockies. He found one which was very pretty which he kept. As it turned out it contained about an ounce of gold, which at the time was selling for a very great deal. Little did he realise when he picked it up how valuable it was. So often, people are sitting on a fortune and don't know it.

How often do we enter the doors on a Sunday, take our seat, and do not realise we are sitting on a fortune. No, not the padded pew beneath us, but the spiritual food we have come to partake of. If we are to make our salvation more sure we must come to realise the surpassing worth of our lives in Christ!

SURPASSING LOVE

A second time Paul uses the word "surpassing" is in Ephesians 3:19, "**and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God**" (RSV). Paul talks about coming to a realisation of the surpassing love of Christ. This passage is part of a prayer that Paul prays which is familiar to most of us. It is a prayer that those at Ephesus might come to "grasp" (NIV) the love of God. All of us have had the frustrating experience of trying to explain how we felt, to someone else, and realised we just weren't getting through. We finally say, "I just really wish you could know how I feel," knowing that it was beyond them to really stand in our shoes. That's what Paul's prayer is like. He wants them to grasp the love of God, yet all along he knows it is beyond their grasp.

In verse 18 Paul vainly tries to describe what it is really an indescribable and immeasurable love. It is really an ironic prayer. Paul is praying that they may know the love of God which he knows they can never fully know. Thus, he describes in verse 19 a love which "surpasses knowledge." The TEV renders the verse, "**Yes, may you come to know His love - although it can never be fully known.**" I don't know how accurate that is, but for me it catches the spirit of what Paul is saying well.

SURPASSING GRACE

The last time Paul talks about a "surpassing" quality is in 2 Corinthians 9:14: . . . "**while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God in you.**" Paul speaks of the "surpassing grace of God" which was "in" the Corinthians. This surpassing grace in us could do so much to make our salvation more sure. What is it? How did we get it?

In 2 Peter 3:18 Peter says that we are to "**grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.**" If one backs up to the beginning of the chapter we find that Paul is challenging the brethren to give. He reminds them that God loves a cheerful giver. Then he tells them by this service which they will be rendering they will be enriched. In verse 13 he tells them by this "service" they will glorify God. Then in verse 14 he tells them of the prayers of others offered in their behalf because of the "**surpassing grace of God**" in them. It seems to me this surpassing grace is tied in with the acts of service they were busy rendering to others. The surpassing grace of God in us the excellence of the Christian life lived daily. The way to grow in the grace of God is to more and more live a life in obedience to His will, full of acts of service and good works. The more we dedicate our lives to acts of service the more we become

like Christ who came to serve. The more we dedicate our lives to acts of service, the more of Christ's goodness is seen in us. We need to grow in the grace of God. If we can reach the point that the "surpassing grace of God" is in us, as it was in the Corinthian brethren because of the acts of service they were rendering, the more sure our salvation will be.

C. YOUNG.

SOWING AND REAPING

"Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh the harvest? Behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest.

And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together.

And herein is that saying true, One soweth, and another reapeth.

I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labour: other men laboured, and ye are entered into their labours."

John 4:35-38

We talk more about evangelism and do less than anybody. It is an obsession that proceeds from our lips yet never enters our lives. Frustration results; guilt results; new methods result! But less evangelism. Therefore, we do not need a minor tuneup - we need a major overhaul. We need to evaluate our mentality - not merely our methods. Our incorrect mentality will only try more fads, gimmicks, gadgets that promise yet cannot produce. Both Christians and sinners are uptight over evangelism. We keep blundering with the same blunders! When will we ever learn? A return to scripture will help. Many of our methods lack biblical integrity. We must learn to do personal work from Jesus in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. He is the Master. Especially must we learn John 4 and John 9. Our methods must not violate his principles.

A COMBINE MENTALITY

We love to see combines in the field. We can almost "smell" the money! Crops must be harvested in season. But there is more to farming than combining. There is more to evangelism than baptising. This is the simple law of seed time and harvest! Read Gal.6:7, Rom. 1:16; Luke 8:11; 1 Cor. 3:5-8; Eph. 4:11-16. Seed must be planted before harvesting can be expected! We have limited evangelism to reaping!

You would be silly to take a wheat combine to a field where no wheat had been planted! No seed - no harvest! You do not combine wheat where you have planted cotton. Jesus said that reapers harvest the work of sowers! Both "sowers" and "reapers" are in evangelism! The farmer controls the sowing but not the harvest. The farmer determines what is planted where, then how much seed per acre. He has no control over the harvest.

The gospel is God's power to save! The direct operation of the Holy Spirit is rejected. Fields white unto harvest indicate prior sowing. Fields cannot be white unless they are "still sown." One cannot say Africa, China are "white" unless seed is there! They may be receptive to the seed but the seed makes the harvest!

SEED SOWING BEFORE SOUL WINNING

This is so simple, obvious. Sow the seed! The Jews hated to sow - they only wanted to reap. We are like that! There is no farm machinery that plants, cultivates, and harvests the same trip! **Learn This!** We cannot reap where we have not sown.

1. This explains our failures in gospel meetings and campaigns. Do we expect a harvest? Are you using the meeting to sow? If so, why demand results? The same is true on campaigns. We demand results! We go to sow and reap the same hour! A Church that cannot get prospects cannot keep converts! Why are you there? to sow? to reap? A Church that exhales disciples will inhale converts.

2. This means time and effort. It has been said that "A man has the right to hear the gospel once before others hear it twice." But a coin has two sides. Few are converted the first time. We must go back and back. Even the family of Jesus did not believe until after the resurrection. The apostle Paul did not obey the first time. Our text has sowers then reapers. Paul planted and Apollos watered. Jesus first saw, then served, then spoke! Sinners can be reached but not pushed. Bread is expected when the plough is sunk. But time and effort are between. In John 1 Jesus said, "come and see."

3. Sowing is painful and strenuous. "Sow in tears and reap in joy" (Psa. 126). Isaiah likens sowing with the pain of childbirth (Isa. 66:28). People artificially got, must be artificially kept. Nothing lasts that grows overnight. Some load the truck; some drive the truck; some unload the truck. They are all in the trucking business. There is no place for pride, criticism. Strong Churches evangelise (Eph. 4:11).

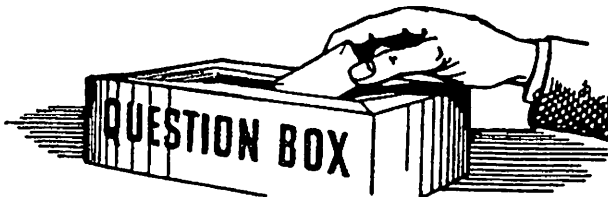
LIFESTYLE EVANGELISM

The whole gospel to the whole world by the whole person. The disciples could not even see "sowing" in John 4 and John 9. In John 4 they were more interested in their bologna sandwiches. Sowing comes from daily contacts not artificial confrontations. If you have no influence upon families and friends, why pick on strangers? Is it better for sinners not to know you? Has evangelism slipped into the sales department?

Read Mat. 28:18-20, "Going, as you go" . . . lifestyle. Evangelism is in our lives before our lips! We have sent out the wrong ones! Evangelism is far more than right answers to selected questions. It is far more than our telling others only what we want them to know. Evangelism is natural . . . yea automatic! We are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Evangelism begins in who we are not merely what we know! Evangelism flows from our lives not our memorised techniques. You don't take up Jesus like jogging.

It is buried seed that grows - not buried talents. Captain Cook was a famous English explorer. Everywhere he went he planted the seed of English flowers. These flowers exist today because he planted seed ! **SOW - SOW - SOW!**

C. HODGE.



Conducted by
Frank Worgan

"Should Christians celebrate Easter? Should we observe 'Easter Sunday' in a special way in our worship?"

I realise that, according to the calendar, this question is late by about three months!

But there were other questions that had to be answered first. In any case, since the 'Easter' query arises almost annually, perhaps you might wish to put aside the answer I am now offering and read it again next year!

What do the scriptures say about the celebration of 'Easter'?

The short answer is, nothing whatsoever. To put it as plainly as I am able; there is no authority in God's Word for setting aside one special day in the year as an occasion for a religious festival commemorating the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead.

There is no mention of 'Easter' to be found anywhere in the Scriptures.

I am well aware of the fact that the word occurs in the 'Authorised Version' in Acts 12:4. The responsibility for this lies with William Tyndale and Thomas Cramer. They erroneously translated the word *pashe* - which means '*passover*' - as 'Easter,' and the mistranslation crept into the A.V., where it remained until the 'Revised Version' appeared and the mistake was removed.

Cramer's inadequacy as a scholar revealed itself on another occasion when, writing about the Jewish Passover celebrations he referred to the Jews eating their '*Easter lamb*'.

If you will read Acts 12 in a modern version you will see that the reference is clearly to the Jewish Passover and not to any so-called 'Easter' celebration of the Lord's resurrection.

So, just as the scriptures do not in any way teach us to hold a special *annual* celebration of the *birth* of Christ, neither are we authorised to set aside a special day for an *annual* observance of His *death* or His *resurrection*.

An Un-Christian Celebration

The simple fact is that 'Easter' is a word connected with paganism and not with Christianity, as any good English Dictionary will reveal. It is an anglicised form of '*Oestre*', the name that was given to the pagan goddess of the dawn of Spring, to whom the month of April was dedicated in Anglo-Saxon times.

Even '*The Catholic Encyclopaedic Dictionary*,' authorised by the church of Rome as its name suggests, admits 'Easter's pagan origins. It states that one of her most revered 'doctors of the Church,' the Venerable Bede, who was born in 673 AD traced those origins back to paganism, and further states that Easter eggs are "*possibly a baptised pagan custom*," and that '*chocolate eggs and such fooleries are a degeneration of no significance*.'

Pre-dating Christianity

In Old Testament times the 'fertility' goddess appears in different cultures and under different names. The Egyptians knew her as 'Ishtar,' whilst to the Greeks, she was 'Astarte.' Her consort in Egypt was 'Osiris' and in Greece, 'Adonis,' whilst to the Babylonians he was 'Tammuz' who is mentioned in Ezekiel 8:14, where we read of women '*weeping for Tammuz*.'

In ancient mythology Tammuz was said to have been killed by a wild boar whilst tending his sheep, but his wife, being a 'goddess,' rescued him from the Underworld and brought him back to life. Those who worshipped Astarte and Tammuz believed that the onset of Winter represented the death of Tammuz and the birth of Spring represented his return to life again.

Now, bear in mind that such ideas were common enough among the pagans, when the Church spread throughout the Roman world in New Testament times. When Constantine declared Christianity to be the 'official' religion of his Empire, the temples and shrines of the pagans were either destroyed, or, more frequently, taken over by the newly elevated Roman Church. The leaders of that Church took the gods and goddesses whom the pagans had been worshipping, along with their feast days and festivals, and - to use Rome's own expression - '*baptised*' them, turning them into supposedly

'Christian' festivals.

And that is *precisely* what 'Easter' is! That is how a celebration which honoured a pagan goddess of fertility and new life, was transformed into something which was declared by the Roman Church, to celebrate the resurrection of Christ from the dead. In this convenient way, the Roman clergy saw to it that their 'converted' pagans did not lose their familiar festivals

Disagreement as to the Date!

After Christendom had adopted this pagan custom as an occasion for celebrating the Lord's resurrection, its leaders found themselves unable to agree on the date! This is not at all surprising since, even before the introduction of the 'Easter' feast, Jewish and non-Jewish Christians disagreed about the true date of the resurrection.

Jewish Christians placed it in the time of the Passover and regarded 14th Nisan as the correct date.

Non-Jewish Christians, on the other hand, always celebrated the resurrection of Christ on the first day of the week - the Lord's day, and it was not until 325 AD, that the Council of Nicea decided it was necessary to authoritatively set, or fix, the date, and they chose '*the first Sunday after the full-moon which follows the Spring Equinox,*'

If you find this reference to the Spring Equinox a bit of a puzzle, this is what it means.

The Equinox is the time of the year when the Sun crosses the Equator and the day and night are equal in length. However, the result of this bizarre decision meant that the date of the celebration of Christ's resurrection could be anywhere between March 22nd and April 25th! Clearly, this was a ridiculous decision for the Council to make, because if the intention is to commemorate a historical event, the commemoration should surely be held on the exact date!

But, even although the *Council* reached this decision, the *people* did not readily accept it. Churches in different parts of the world continued to hold their own celebrations.

During one year alone in the 9th century, there were celebrations of the Resurrection of Christ on three different dates.

In France - or Gaul, as it was then called - they observed March 21st.

In Italy, it was April 18th.

In Egypt, it was April 25th, and there was so much controversy about the date that it even led to bloodshed.

Here, in the United Kingdom, as late as 1928, the Government decided that a 'fixed date' for the celebration of 'Easter' should be agreed upon. But no action was taken, because, yet again, church leaders are unable to agree on a date!

So, in the 'religious' calendar, 'Easter' continues to be regarded as a '*moveable feast.*'

What harm is there in 'Easter'?

For thinking people, there is a great deal of harm.

1. It reduces one of the most important historical events of the Christian faith, to a sham celebration and a farce, whose date shifts from year to year.

2. It trivialises and secularises a fact on which the Christian faith rests; the fact that Jesus rose from the dead, turning it into a vulgar commercial opportunity similar to 'Christmas.'

(I remember seeing '*Easter Eggs*' on sale just a few days after the 'Christmas' celebrations).

3. It undermines the scriptural teaching of the weekly celebration of the Lord's life, death and resurrection in the Lord's Supper, so faithfully observed by the New

Testament Church.

After the adoption of 'Easter' it was not long before churches began to move away from that weekly celebration, and the Roman Church introduced the 'Mass' instead.

Conclusion

If, then, we ignore the denominational celebration of 'Easter', and like the first Christians, hold faithfully to the observance of the Lord's Supper on the Lord's own Day, have we lost anything? Nothing at all!

We need no 'Easter Sunday', because every first day of the week is a celebration honouring a risen and living Saviour, and what we remember is something which goes far beyond any historical fact, however important that fact may be.

(*Questions to*: Frank Worgan, 5 Gryfebank Way, Houston, Renfrewshire, Scotland. PA6 7NZ.)

THE ALL SUFFICIENT WORD

The Bible is an inspired revelation that will last forever, and claims to be an all sufficient guide in matters of belief, practice and life.

It is most important that we fully and clearly understand this fundamental teaching of the Scriptures about the Scriptures. In this day there are many different religions and churches, all claiming to be God authorised and God approved and yet all different in belief and teaching. All men have something on which they think they should base their religious beliefs and practices. Some appeal to their own feelings, opinions, thinking and experiences, as a basis for determining right and wrong before God. Others rely upon their priest, pastor, or church to tell them what they are to think and do. Still others follow tradition. That tradition may be one established over the years by a particular church, or it may simply be a tradition held by a man's immediate family.

If God accepts and approves all of these various ideas, and if God permits man to decide right and wrong in religion on this variety of different standards, then God is partial and a God of confusion. Yet the Bible teaches us that He is neither partial (Acts 2:11;10:34), nor a God who creates and approves of confusion (1 Cor. 14:33).

The Bible teaches that the Scriptures are the only guide God recognises in religion. Hence, they are the only guide that man can recognise and follow, and still please God. Notice the following statements:

John 8:31: "If you continue in My word, then you are truly My disciples." Christ here points out that to be a disciple of His (that is, a Christian) a man must "continue" in **HIS WORD**. To "continue" means abide by, or remain within the limits of His word. Just because a man claims to be a disciple of Christ's does not make him one. Neither is one a Christian just because others say he is. One is not even a Christian because some church, or all churches, recognise him as such. One is recognised by Christ as a Christian **ONLY IF** that person **CONTINUES IN CHRIST'S WORD**. Did not the Lord Himself say so?

Then John writes, "**Whoever goes onward and abides not in the teaching of Christ, has not God**" (2 John 9). God's word tells us that we must believe and do to be pleasing to God. But if he does not abide by that teaching, he is **WITHOUT GOD**, no matter how sincere he may be. If we must "continue" in Christ's words to be His disciples, and if going beyond His word means we have not God, then surely we must conclude that Christ's teaching, or scripture, is the only guide we can follow and be saved. If this is not the case, what do these verses mean?

Other verses point out the same idea. Read Galatians 1:8,9. In this reference, Paul

states that man, or angel, who preaches, or teaches, a gospel that is different from that which the inspired apostle originally preached is **ACCURSED**. This fearful pronouncement ought to cause every believer to pause and carefully re-examine what he has done in attempting to become a Christian, and what he professes to believe and do as a Christian. For if it is **"contrary to that which"** the apostles preached, he stands accursed before God! The Scriptures show clearly that it is possible to be very religious, and equally sincere in the practice of that religion, and yet be lost! Read Matthew 7:21-23. Paul's statement in Galatians 1:8,9 points out this truth . . . the Scriptures are the only guide we dare recognise in religion.

THOROUGHLY FURNISHED

In 2 Timothy 3:16,17, Paul shows us that the Scriptures are a **COMPLETE** guide. That is they supply man with everything he needs to know to please God. What they say is not part of God's will for man. For **"The secret things belong unto the Lord our God"** (Deuteronomy 29:29). It has been said that people are not divided religiously about what the Bible says, but about what it does not say. Re-read 2 Timothy 3:16,17 carefully. Notice that Paul says the Scriptures **"thoroughly furnish"** us with the knowledge of **"all good works."** Now since the Scriptures "thoroughly furnish" us they leave nothing out that we need to know. And since they leave nothing out that we need to know, they are an all-sufficient guide. Likewise, they tell us **"all"** the works God considers "good." Since they tell us "all," they leave none out. Leaving none out, they are all sufficient as a guide for they contain all. Read 2 Peter 1:3 and notice the same truth.

The Scriptures are a complete guide because they are "truth." **"Thy word is truth"** (John 17:17). They are not just "some of the truth," but **ALL** truth, for Jesus promised the Holy Spirit would guide the Apostles into "all the truth" (John 16:13). The Holy Spirit certainly must have done so, for Jesus did not lie. That the Holy Spirit did so is clear when we remember 2 Timothy 3:16,17. The Scriptures tell us "all" good works, and furnish us "thoroughly." How can this be, if they do not contain "all the truth"? Jude adds, **"Contend earnestly for the faith once for all delivered to the saints"** (Jude 3).

Revelation 22:18,19 says that we are **not to add to, or take from God's word**. To add to God's word is sin. To add practices not taught in God's word is sinful. So to take away practices taught in God's word is sinful. Since we are not to add to God's word, nor take from it, there is only one thing left to do. That is **DO EXACTLY AS IT SAYS, AND ONLY WHAT IT SAYS**. Since this is the case, surely we can again see that the Scriptures are to be our only guide in religion.

R. DOUGLAS.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Sept. 3	Psalm 44	Romans 8:18-39
Sept. 10	Exodus 33:12-23	Romans 9:1-18
Sept. 17	Isaiah 1:1-20	Romans 9:19-33
Sept. 24	Deut. 30	Romans 10

THE GLORY TO COME

Verse 18 of chapter 8 is inspirational.

It reads: **"For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."** Jesus is our example here. We read in Hebrews: **". . . looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God"** (12:2). Jesus suffered in

this world and we can expect the same. He once told His disciples: **"Blessed are you, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake. Rejoice, and be exceed glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets who were before you"** (Matthew 5:11,12). Peter wrote: **"Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf"** (1 Peter 4:16).

The Christian lives in hope. He looks beyond this scene of time to a glorious and eternal world. He knows this world is not his home. He regards himself as but a stranger and pilgrim here (1 Peter 2:11). He is in eager expectation, as is the whole creation (8:19-22). He takes comfort in the fact that **"all things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are called according to His purpose"** (8:28). He trusts in God absolutely and leaves everything to Him. The Almighty has not left him helpless, because the support of the Holy Spirit is always there (8:26,27).

THE TRIUMPH OF FAITH

In any event, who can separate the Christian from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus? Paul gives us a list from **"tribulation to any other creature"** (8:35-39). He wrote from experience. **"Principalities"** and **"powers"** are terms to do with angels (8:38). The Jews believed there was a recognised hierarchy of angels divided into principalities, powers, mights, dominions, archangels and angels. **"Things present"** and **"things to come"** (8:38), have reference to the Jewish division of time. They contemplated this present age and the age to come. **"Now Paul is saying that regardless of the nature of things presently existing and regardless of the nature of what lies in the future, one thing is certain. No power will be able to break the**

bond of love which welds and links us to our Creator" (W. Carl Ketcherside). **"Height"** and **"depth"** (8:39) are technical terms dealing with the ascendancy of the stars or planets. In other words, he is on about astrology, which a lot of people believed in then and, sad to say, a lot of people believe in today. The star that really matters is **"the bright and morning star"** (Revelation 22:16), who is Jesus Himself.

GOD'S SOVEREIGN CHOICE

Paul had been brought up a Jew of the strict sect of the Pharisees (Philippians 3:4-6). His desire and prayer above all was that Israel might be saved (10:1). He worked tirelessly to this end, but their unbelief distressed him beyond measure. They should have no problem in coming to Christ because He was the fulfilment of their religion. Everything pointed to Jesus and, yet, many of them did not see Him as the promised Messiah. I myself see this as one of the great tragedies of history. They are without excuse, **"Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, for ever praised! Amen"** (9:4,5, NIV).

I have listened in my time to a lot of people who have questioned the plans and purposes of Almighty God. Personally, I decided a long time ago to accept simply what God has willed and what God has planned. I know that I will never fully understand this side of heaven the Divine mind. My mind is too feeble! What did Jehovah once say? **"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts"**

(Isaiah 55:8,9). Actually the previous verse to these two is very relevant to our study of Romans 9. It reads: **"Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him: and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon"** (55:7). Please note what has to be done to receive God's mercy and pardon.

Paul mentions a number of Old Testament characters in developing his argument: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob or Israel, Esau, Sarah, Rebecca and Moses. He also quotes from Hosea, Isaiah and Malachi, as well as naming Sodom and Gomorrah. To Paul, the Old Testament Scriptures contained facts of history. These books were part of God's revelation to mankind. They therefore could be trusted and relied upon. I thank God that in this chapter the call of the Gentiles is highlighted and the remnant of God is disclosed. (God has always been in the remnant business.) This remnant today is spiritual Israel - those who are sons and daughters by promise and not by the flesh. "Verse 8: The 'children of the promise' in Paul's exegesis are those who, like, Abraham, believe the promise of God and are therefore Abraham's spiritual offspring. Compare 4:11-18, and also the 'allegory' which Paul draws out of the Isaac-Ishmael narrative in Galatians 4:22-31" (F. F. Bruce).

HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY

There are numerous Old Testament quotations from chapter 9 verse 30 to the end of chapter 10. There are quotes from Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Isaiah, Joel and the Psalms. Paul in this section speaks of two ways - the way of law and the way of faith. They are illustrated by quotations from the works of Moses or the Pentateuch. Moses E. Lard gives us the following summaries in his commentary: "The Gentiles from some cause were not seeking justification. Yet they

found it. Why? Because with glad hearts they sought it in Christ in whom alone it is found. But Israel were seeking justification; and yet they did not find it. Why? Because they sought it not by belief in Christ, but by works of law, in which way it can never be found . . . The justification of the law defined and shown to be impracticable. No insuperable difficulties to be surmounted in order to justification by belief. On the contrary, its requirements are easy and lie within reach of all. Belief and confession will secure it. No longer any difference between Jew and Greek in receiving God's favour. All to enjoy it on the same conditions . . . All Jews in Judea, and many Gentiles, at that time, had either heard of Christ or had the opportunity to do so; for the preachers of the gospel had offered it to them. Israel were ignorant of the fact of their rejection, notwithstanding both Moses and Isaiah had plainly foretold it."

I have often meditated upon these words: **"But the righteousness which is of faith speaks on this wise, Say not in your heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (That is, to bring Christ down from above: (or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.) But what says it? The word is near you, even in your mouth and in your heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach . . ." (10:6-8).** Actually, Paul is quoting part of Moses' farewell exhortation to Israel as found in Deuteronomy 30:11-14. "Christ, the ground of hope, is not by our own efforts to be brought down from heaven to save us, for that is done; nor by our efforts to be raised from the dead, for that is done; and what remains for us, that is, to believe, is easy and is near to us. This is the meaning of the whole passage" (Albert Barnes).

IAN S, DAVIDSON,
Motherwell.

TEST YOUR BIBLICAL KNOWLEDGE

1. Only two of the tribes adhered to this king.
2. He slew a lion in a pit in a time of snow.
3. Dogs ate her flesh.
4. The mountain of blessing.
5. The city of king Ahasuerus.
6. Ezekiel was among the captives by this river.
7. What happened at the gate of Nain?
8. Who was the chief publican in Jericho?
9. Who said: "Sir, we would see Jesus?"
10. Who championed Saul before the apostles?

THANKS

Sister Nellie Wilson would like to thank all those who sent cards, flowers and 'phone calls during her recent hospitalisation, and all those who remembered her in their prayers,

These were very much appreciated. Nellie is keeping better, and trying to recapture some of her strength. Thank you.

COMING EVENTS

CHURCH AT PETERHEAD

Special weekend

Dates/Times:

Saturday, 16th September, 7.00 p.m.

Sunday, 17th September, 10.00 a.m.,
11.00 a.m., 6.00 p.m.

Speaker: Andy Scott (Kirkcaldy) D.V.

Gospel Mission

Dates/Times: Wednesday, 15th
to Sunday 19th November
Wednesday to Saturday, 7.00 p.m.

Sunday, 10.00 a.m., 11.00 a.m.,
6.00 p.m.

Speaker: Frank Worgan D.V.

Social Weekend

Dates: 7th-8th October (inclusive)

Times: Saturday 7th - 3.00 p.m.
Sunday, 8th - 10.00 a.m., 11.00 a.m.
and 6.00 p.m.

*Speakers: John Morgan (Hindley)
Mitch Vick (Stirling)*

A warm welcome awaits all.

ANNIVERSARY MEETING

Kentish Town, London

To be held October 7th at 3.00 p.m.

Tea at 4.45 p.m. and

Evening Meeting at 6.30 p.m.

Speaker: John Kneller (Tranent).

GHANA APPEAL

A few months ago we sent Brother Fobi to a hospital for treatment for various ailments, I am pleased to say that I have been informed that he has survived all three operations and should be discharged from the hospital. Please remember him in your prayers.

GHANA APPEAL CHANGE OF MANAGEMENT

After 11 years of running the Ghana Appeal with the help of Bill Cook and my wife Loraine I have decided that it is time for a change. I have used all my spare time in this work and I am now in a situation that I have no time for preparation for speaking and no time for personal Bible study. I wrote enquiring of a number of congregations if they would be prepared to keep this work going and I received a positive response from the church in Dennyloanhead. I am very pleased with the responses as this congregation have shown most interest and given more of their resources than any other congregation. They intend to divide the various tasks and allocate them to different members. When this is finalised, new points of contact will be announced in the *Scripture Standard*. I can say that the Secretary for the Ghana Appeal will now be Peter Sneddon and the Treasurer Janet MacDonald. Until the new system is up and running, I will continue to accept money for the work

and I will transfer the money when their Bank account is set up. There will, of course, be a period of parallel running. This will probably be my last appeal. I would like to sincerely thank everyone who has made this appeal a success. Without your help this work could not even have begun. I would ask that you continue to support the new mangement and especially remember them in your prayers. The work is rewarding and uplifting but it also has its share of deep disappointments and frustrations. May the Lord bless those who continue this work.

Graeme Pearson,
13 Fairways, Duffermline,
Fife. KY12 0DU.

P.S. Thank you IMB for the cheque for £100.00 received on 8th July, 2000, Receipt No. 1362.

JOHN HUSS CHALLENGES US

John Huss, martyr, who was burned at the stake for his faith, July 6, 1415 leaves us this challenge: "If I cannot deliver the truth in spite of all I do, at least I refuse to be the enemy of the truth and will resist to the death all argument with falsehood. Let the world run its course as God permits. It is better to die well than to live badly. We must not sin to avoid the punishment of death. To

end in grace the present life is to be banished from misery . . . He that fears death loses the joys of life. Above all else Truth is Conqueror. He conquers who is slain; for no adversary hurts him. No iniquity hath dominion over him."

- 10. Jezebel (Revelation 2:20).
- 9. 7 years (Luke 2:36).
- 8. Chloe's (1 Corinthians 1:11).
- (John 19:38-39)
- 7. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus
- 6. Ahab (2 Chronicles 18:1).
- 5. Asa (2 Chronicles 17:1).
- 4. 40 days (Ezekiel 4:6).
- 3. Ben-Hadad (2 Kings 8:7-15).
- 2. Caleb (Judges 1:12).
- 1. 52 days (Nehemiah 6:15).

JULY ANSWERS

- 10. Barmabas (Acts 9:27).
- 9. Certain Greeks (John 12:20,21).
- 8. Zacchaeus (Luke 19:2).
- the dead (Luke 7:11-15)
- 7. Jesus raised a widow's son from
- 6. Chebar or Kebar (Ezekiel 1:3).
- 5. Shushan or Susa (Esther 3:15).
- 4. Gerizim (Deuteronomy 27:12).
- 3. Jezebel (2 Kings 9:36).
- 2. Benahiah (2 Samuel 23:20).
- 1. Rehoboam (1 Kings 12:21).

AUGUST ANSWERS

THE SCRIPTURE STANDARD is published monthly.

PRICE PER COPY— POST PAID FOR ONE YEAR

UNITED KINGDOM.....	£9.60	
OVERSEAS BY SURFACE MAIL	£10.00	(\$16.00US or \$20.00Can)
OVERSEAS BY AIR MAIL	£14.00	(\$22.00US or \$28.00Can)

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"The Scripture Standard" is printed for the publishers by

Lothian Printers, 109 High Street, Dunbar, East Lothian. EH42 1ES Tel: (01368) 863785