

The SCRIPTURE STANDARD

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

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IT ALL DEPENDS ON US

Politicians tell us that the British have been living lives much too 'institutionalised' with far too much dependence upon the State, and that the time has come for far more enterprise from the individual: with the formation of small firms and privatisation. Far be it for me to comment on this political view but certainly there seems to be in, the spiritual realm, a drop in the membership of 'institutionalised religion', and a movement away from the State Church to smaller and more enterprising evangelical groups. Church membership, traditionally and denominationally, has been 'nationalised' for a very long time and this new society of free-thinkers would seem to be a healthy development. After all: our relationship with God is entirely *personal* to ourselves, and on Judgement Day we shall stand or fall, as individuals, and will not be able to blame the State, the Church, or parents, or clergy for any of our short-comings on that Day. The apostle Peter says to everybody, "Save yourselves from this wicked generation." We can't be saved by proxy, or on the merits of some friend or relative. As Paul says "So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God." (Rom. 14:12).

SELF-ESTEEM

We live in a selfish environment. We must all find our way in life; do the best we can and fulfil our responsibilities (to employers and families etc.). Paul says that if a man provides not for his own he is worse than an infidel, and if a man will not work neither should he eat. This is an individual responsibility. All others, in the world, are pursuing similar goals and there is a tendency for the weak and timid to be trampled underfoot. It is a very selfish world. However, many do reach a point in the human 'rat race' when they realise that there is more to life than personal advancement, and that man was not designed *to live by bread alone*. Man is God's offspring and eventually he feels his insufficiency without his Maker, and eventually he acknowledges that true contentment involves peace with God. Indeed the men who have achieved all earthly ambitions are amongst the first to reach disillusionment with self-seeking. Struck by the apparent futility of money-making (for there are no pockets in shrouds) many a millionaire has exclaimed with Solomon, "Vanity of Vanities: all is vanity," and turned his talents to charitable works. We need self-enlightenment.

SELF-ASSESSMENT

There comes a crisis-point in every busy life (such as the death of a loved one) when close introspection takes place. We begin to ponder, like Solomon, the point and purpose of it all. Where have we come from: why are we here, and where are we bound? Each person, at some time or other, will come to such watersheds in life, and are almost certainly bound to come to the wrong conclusions unless they consult the proper source of guidance in such

matters: the Bible. If we have trouble with the car, or washing machine, we reach for *the maker's Instruction Manual*. Likewise, in the perplexing puzzles and problems of life, the true answers are to be found only in the Maker's Handbook. And so, any self-assessment must be made in the light of God's word. The poet Burns longed for the ability for man to see himself as others saw him, but conceded the unlikelihood. Obviously there is a way in which we view ourselves; a way in which others see us: and a light in which God perceives us: and all three may radically differ. The farmer who had to erect new barns to contain his new-found wealth saw himself as supremely successful with an extremely rosy future, but God saw him very differently and said, "Thou fool". Any meaningful self-assessment must begin with the premise that no matter who we are, what we are, where we are, we are all sinners in God's sight and need reconciliation to our Maker. All current activity and future plans must stop until that condition is rectified, and until we wash away our sins in the waters of baptism and rise to walk in newness of life. Thereafter, all proposals for life must be structured around Christ, as our Saviour, and His will must be paramount. We each must come to this point in life.

SELF-ABASEMENT

Accurate *self-assessment* will lead to *self-abasement*. The disconcerting discovery that we are not as good as we supposed may lead, initially, to the impulse of self-justification. This is not new. Adam blamed Eve, and Eve blamed the serpent. Cain, Saul, Aaron and the Pharisees all sought to blame others for their own inadequacies. Jesus encountered many such, and once gave a parable to "certain that trusted in themselves that they were righteous" (Luke 18:9). With God nothing is impossible, yet God says He cannot exalt those who exalt themselves, but He can do something for the truly humble. Only those who strike rock-bottom, and can admit their entire spiritual bankruptcy, can resolve, with the Prodigal Son, "I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, I have sinned against heaven, and before Thee". Only those whose quality of self-abasement matches that of the Publican, can cry, "God be merciful to me, a sinner". When Peter accused the Jews (Acts2) of having murdered their Messiah, they had no thoughts of contesting the charge but cried out in anguish, "What shall we do?". A straight question got a straight answer from Peter. He commanded them to "Repent and be baptised", every one of them, for the remission of their sins, and they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Each had to decide to do this, as an individual. It couldn't, and can't, be done by proxy.

SELF-DENIAL

Those who have chosen to follow Christ have chosen not a rosy path but a stony. I suppose a great deal depends upon the century and country in which we were born. Some have had to face lions in the Colosseum, and some the Spanish Inquisition, but even under normal conditions the Christian life is supposed to be one of service and self-sacrifice. This is not a popular theme. Jesus, Himself, said, "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me". And Jesus, Himself, set the standard in this self-denial, that He looks for in others. Jesus was "He who, His own self, bare our sins, in His own body, on the tree." "His own self" and "His own body" surely emphasise this theme of individuality. Christ's self-sacrifice was uniquely His own. No one could help Him in it: not even God. Indeed God's own self-denial is evident, "For God spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all". We are no longer our own: we have been bought at a price.

Paul calls upon all to give "our reasonable service": that which will be acceptable to God. And what was the extent of that reasonable service? That we present ourselves (our bodies) as living sacrifices on the altar of service and activity, not conformed to the world but transformed, by the renewal of our minds (Rom. 12:1). And so each individual has to decide for himself, or herself, the degree of any self-sacrifice offered to God, for, as the

hymnwriter expressed it, "Only he who bears the cross can ever hope to wear the crown". As individuals, do we live lives of self-denial, or self-indulgence? We control this entirely by ourselves.

SELF-EXAMINATION

"But let a man examine himself", said Paul (1 Cor. 11:28) in the context of his approach to the Lord's Table, but the exhortation is worthy of more general application. Self-examination combats self-deception: which is very real and greatly widespread. Evidently man is quick and ready to believe what he wants to believe: and there are always those willing to tell us what we want to hear. James reminds us how easy it is for us to "deceive our own hearts" (1:16) and Paul mentions some who would not only deceive others but just as readily deceive themselves (2 Tim. 3:13). Paul exhorted "Every man among you" not to "think of himself more highly than he ought" but to think soberly and honestly (Rom. 12:3). To the fickle Corinthians Paul rehearsed all the shortcomings of the Israelites as an example to profit by, and concluded with the warning, "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth beware, lest he fall." (1 Cor. 10:12). And amongst Paul's final words to these same Corinthians he urged, "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith: prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates." (2 Cor. 13:5). Strong words indeed and not for the squeamish. We much prefer to examine others; and catalogue their deficiencies but this is not what the apostle had in mind. "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith".

CONCLUSION: SELF-EXPRESSION

Not being automatons or robots, we are entirely free agents and responsible for what we do, or fail to do. Certainly, as Paul once observed, there is a continual war amongst our members and quite often we end up doing things we ought not to do, and vice versa. Even Paul, himself, was always conscious that having preached to others, he himself might be a castaway. Self-expression (i.e. what we actually do, or fail to do) seems the only real, true and accurate measure of our commitment to Christ.

Judas conspired to take 30 pieces of silver for Jesus: Demas left the Church (having preferred this evil world) Alexander and Hymeneus made shipwreck of their faith. At Christ's trial they all forsook him and fled, and similarly at Paul's trial no man stood with him. These men all voted with their feet. They are not judged by their words but by their actions.

It is said that what we put in the treasury bag on a Sunday accurately expresses what we really think of the Lord and His work. It is said that attendances at Bible Studies reflect what the Church truly thinks of God and His word. It is probably true that our attitude to the Lord's Table, and how we observe it, is the real comment on how we regard the Lord's death, and His memory. These are the things which *correctly measure the pulse and temperature of the Church*, and tell us whether it is hot, cold or just luke-warm. In the industrial realm of today the workers endure the hackneyed rhetoric and meaningless Union jargon, but just occasionally they get up and vote with their feet. In the church there can also be hackneyed rhetoric and even jargon, but the real votes for God are cast with the feet. We all have free-expression and make our own, individual, contribution to the Lord's work. Our feet either take us to the Lord's work, and the meetings, or take us in the opposite direction. Jesus depends on us, each and every one of us.

We are His hands, feet, eyes, mouth and mind. Some complain that the Church isn't doing much: but we can't blame 'the Church': we are the Church, all as individuals.

God calls upon all men to a point of self-assessment and self-abasement; to acknowledge their sins and their need of a Saviour. Those who profess a love for Christ: and claim discipleship, must constantly review that claim and that love by self-examination and self-sacrifice. These we must do entirely by ourselves: there can be no proxy or substitute.

As Paul says, in these wonderful closing verses, we must work out our very own salvation.

"Wherefore my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. Do all things without murmurings and disputings that ye may be blameless and harmless, the Sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world. Holding forth the words of life." (Phil 2:12-16). There is really no such thing as "institutionalised" Christianity: men and women can only be true disciples of Christ by their own *personal* commitment, efforts and labours.

EDITOR.

GLEANINGS

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

SOW BESIDE ALL WATERS

"In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand."

Ecclesiastes 11:6

THE BIBLE SPEAKS

"Blessed are ye that sow beside all waters."

Isaiah 32:20

"They that sow in tears shall reap in Joy."

Psalms 126:5

"He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him"

Psalms 126:6

"There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty."

Proverbs 11:24

"He that watereth shall be watered also himself."

Proverbs 11:25

"Multiply your seed sown, and increase the fruits of your righteousness; . . ."

2 Corinthians 9:10

"In due season we shall reap, if we faint not."

Galatians 6:9

JESUS SAID

"But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd."

Then saith He unto His disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few;

Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He will send forth labourers into His harvest."

Matthew 9:36-38

"After these things the Lord appointed other seventy also, and sent them two and two before His face into every city and place, whither He Himself would come."

Therefore said He unto them, The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest; that He would send forth labourers into His harvest."

Luke 10:1-2

"Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish His work."

Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh 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 4:34-38

BRINGING IN THE SHEAVES

Sowing in the morning, sowing seeds of kindness,
Sowing in the noontide and the dewy eves;
Waiting for the harvest, and the time of reaping,
We shall come rejoicing, bringing in the sheaves!

Bring in the sheaves! bringing in the sheaves!
We shall come rejoicing, bringing in the sheaves!

AT THY COMMAND

"Lord, if at Thy command the Word of Life we sow,
Watered by Thy Almighty hand, the seed shall surely grow."

WE QUOTE F. B. MEYER

"Not in husbanding our strength, but in yielding it in service;
not in burying our talents, but in administering them;
not in hoarding our seed in the barn, but in scattering it;
not in following an earthly, human policy, but in surrendering ourselves to the will of God,
do we find the safe and blessed path."

GLEANINGS

"Only a drop in the bucket, but every drop will tell;
The bucket will soon be empty without the drops in the well."
"We cannot do everything at once, but we can do something at once."

SOMEONE HAS SAID

"Go forth, go forth for Jesus now! Be working! Be watching!
The Lord Himself will teach you how to watch and pray;
'Tis not for thee thy field to choose, no work He gives must thou refuse;
Be working! Be watching! Be praying! Go forth to work to watch, to pray!
'Tis Jesus who calls thee, the harvest waits for thee some day, to bring some sheaves for God."

WORTH NOTING

"It has been aptly said that a religion:-

That does nothing:
That gives nothing:
That cost nothing:
That suffers nothing:

- Is worth nothing."

Selected by Leonard Morgan

A GOD WHO REWARDS

The burden of the human author of the letter to the Hebrews is to give ample encouragement to those Jewish Christians who had been brought up under Moses but had

been converted to Christ and were in grave danger of returning to a defunct system; a system superseded by that which was God-designed to be the fulfilment of the old. Whereas "the law came by Moses, grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (John 1:17).

In order to impress upon his readers the imperative nature of remaining faithful to God through Jesus, the writer uses *the contrast method* - Jesus is greater than . . . (See Hebrews 3:5,6); *the warning method* (3:12-19), and *gentle encouragement* ("Let us hold fast . . .)cf. Hebrews 10:23.

Underneath all these things is one life-support system - faith. While some, says the author, are shrinking back into destruction, "the righteous shall live by faith" (10:38). Then, like a saturated rain cloud, he burst forth with 40 verses on that subject. This is Hebrews, chapter 11.

WE MUST POSSESS FAITH TO PLEASE GOD

Here in our text is the only place in the New Covenant Scriptures where an attempt to define the word is made. Even here, it seems more likely that the author is describing what faith does than defining what faith is. It is said to be "the assurance of things hoped for the conviction of things not seen."

Observe the positive nature of the "faith" here as it is linked to such terms as hope, assurance and conviction.

Hope in the Bible is not wishful thinking or simply desire, but desire with a note of expectation as seen in Philemon 2. Here Paul planned to be seeing his friend due to Philemon's prayers.

Assurance is defined as "the underlying essence of a thing" or "firmly grounded confidence". In ancient times the word stood for "the whole body of documents bearing on the ownership of a person's property, deposited in the archives, and forming the evidence of ownership" (Moulton and Milligan). They suggest "title-deed" as an accurate translation of the original word.

Conviction - "means of proving"; "demonstration". It is the evidence of the unseen. Moses left Egypt in faith, "seeing Him who is unseen" (Hebrews 11:27). Did Moses see God? He certainly did. Moses was a man living by faith.

The translation of Hebrews 11:1 in the New International Version is most interesting: "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."

Faith allows us to look backward. We can see both creation and the cross. "By faith we understand . . ." (v.3). "Understand" in the original language is "to perceive with the mind, as distinct from perception from feeling." That is, we see with the eye of the mind and not with the eye of the body. By faith we can know that God "created the heavens and the earth."

The very reason for our hope is the cross. If you had lived in Jerusalem around 30 A.D., chances are you could have witnessed this horrible event. That would, of course, require no faith on your part. But something would be missing: "Why did it happen?" "How does God view this?" These questions would remain unanswered if it were not for faith - faith that allows us to know that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself" (2 Corinthians 5:19). What a staggering thought!

Since we were not present at Golgotha, the whole happening and its meaning is to us a matter of faith. Yes, we saw Christ, "publicly portrayed as crucified" (Galatians 3:1), when the gospel was proclaimed to us.

Faith enables us to look forward. The very word "hope" suggests the future. As saved sinners, we have our hopes not in this life only. We recognise that we are in the world but not of the world, and that we continue our journey toward "that city whose architect and builder is God" (Hebrews 11:10). Remember: "faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."

WE MUST BELIEVE THAT GOD EXISTS

This is the first step on the pathway to God. Without belief that, "There is a God, He is alive", worship would be a nonsensical exercise of superstition. We must be cautious here though. Faith does not put God there, and lack of faith does not remove Him. Our God is not the God of the "bunny-in-the-hat trick."

The Bible pictures God on a throne (Revelation 4:2). It is a throne of power (I Kings 22:19). It is seen as a throne of judgement (Revelation 20:11-15). But it also is a throne of grace (Hebrew 4:16). Brother, sister - can you visualize standing in the same room as royalty? This is a rare scene but one which is real to the saint who believes "God is".

WE MUST BELIEVE THAT GOD REWARDS

Our faith in Him includes a belief that He will keep His word and reward us. Please read the passage again: "Whoever comes to God must believe that . . . he is a rewarder . . ." There it is. Not only do we believe there is a God; not only do we hold to the belief that He will reward; but, it should be stressed, one **MUST** believe that God rewards in order to come into His presence!

Twentieth century Christians, we are not alone in this belief and in this effort. Listen: "By faith Abraham . . . obeyed for he was looking for the city" (Hebrews 11:8-10). Again we read "By faith Moses considered the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking for (or to) the reward" (Hebrews 11:23-26).

The Bible is clear on this point; seeking the reward is a legitimate reason to serve God. Study these passages: Matthew 5:12 - "great is your reward in heaven"; Colossians 3:24 - ". . . from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance"; John 8 - "Watch . . . that you receive a full reward"; Revelation 22:12 - "Behold . . . my reward is with me".

The reward is sometime spoken of in more specific terms such as "the crown of life" (Revelation 2:10) and "Entrance into the everlasting kingdom" (2 Peter 1:10). We receive encouragement by reading the warning given to others. ". . . do not throw away your confidence which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised" (Hebrews 10:35,36).

The rich young ruler came to Jesus and asked one question. It could be stated like this: "What can I do in order to receive the reward?" You will notice that Jesus gave him a straight answer. In other words, Jesus agreed with reward-motivated service. (See Matthew 19:16-30).

As Christians we should not doubt the validity of this concept. We know that Jesus held out salvation from sins as the reward to obedient believers (Mark 16:15,16). When we believed and confessed we expected (didn't we?) to receive what the Lord had promised - righteousness and salvation (Romans 10:9,10). At the time our hearts were pierced through with sorrow which brought about repentance and as we were being immersed into a body of water, we knew God would not fail to give what He had promised - remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). Truly, we believe that God rewards.

OUR REWARD IS IN HEAVEN

As saints of the Most High God, we adore Him for giving us "all spiritual blessings . . . in Christ" (Ephesians 1:3); for making us "New creatures" (2 Corinthians 5:17); and for "raising us up to sit in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 2:6). What rejoicing there should be right now for the ever-present rewards from God. Yet, there is more - so much more. This much we know: an imperishable, undefiled and unfading inheritance is "reserved in heaven" for those of us who have been "born again to a living hope". While we are waiting for "a salvation ready to be revealed . . ." we are "protected by the power of God through faith" (1 Peter 1:3-5). Can we ask for more ??? We serve a God who rewards

our labours.

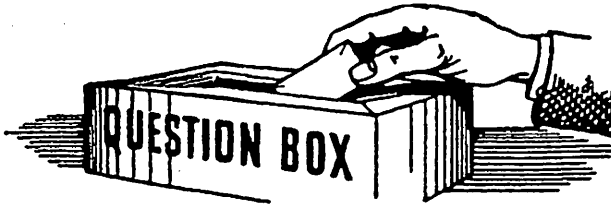
In conclusion we go to prison - a Roman prison. There we find a man who has given his life to Christ. But, for some reason, things have not turned out as he would have arranged them. He had been commissioned by God to preach the word to the world, but when he spoke to some, they stoned him and left him for dead. Where was his protection now? Good question.

He was hindered from doing his best (he believed) by a "thorn in the flesh". Surely even common sense would tell him that God would remove this "thing". He prayed three times. The answer? "You'll keep the thorn in the flesh" because "My grace is enough for you!" It was his lot to suffer shipwreck, be beaten many times, go hungry and thirsty, and be falsely imprisoned. Why?

"Paul", we timidly ask, "After all these things, it would be rather difficult for you to put much confidence in your . . . ah . . . well . . . uh . . . rewarder, wouldn't it?"

"Not at all", he replies. "For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day - and not to me only, but to all those who have longed for his appearing" (2 Timothy 4:6-8).

G. MANSFIELD



Conducted by
Alf Marsden

"Is it wise to replace the King James Bible (A.V.) for the more up-to-date New International Version (N.I.V.) or for any other Version?"

Most Christians of an older generation (including myself), as babes in Christ were 'teethed', as it were, on the Authorised Version of the Bible. It has been referred to, by those who have known and loved it - and still love it - as the 'proper' Bible. There have been quite a number of different versions since the King James Version; there will probably be more. There have also been some Bibles which can be correctly termed as 'Paraphrases'. I think, then, that we would do well to define what we are talking about.

SOME DEFINITIONS

It is not my intention to go into all the technical details of 'How we got our Bible'; the Open Bible School has a very useful lesson on this. I shall content myself with defining what I consider to be the salient points as demanded by the answer I shall give.

The verb 'to translate' means to give the sense of the words, etc., in another language; e.g., from Greek and Latin to English in our case. You will no doubt recall that Enoch was 'translated' from one place, earth, to another place, Heaven, without suffering the intermediate death which is common to all.

A **Version** is a translation of the Bible, or any portion of it, in to vernacular tongues for the benefit of those who only imperfectly understand the original, or who do not understand it at all.

A version can be either 'immediate' or 'mediate'. The 'immediate' are made directly from the original text; the 'mediate' are through the medium of other translations. 'Immediate' versions of the O.T. which have come to us are: the Septuagint, the Syriac Peshitta, and the Latin Vulgate.

A 'Paraphrase' is a re-statement of the sense of a passage in other words. We often hear preachers quote a passage from a particular Version, and then give what they consider to be the sense of the passage in other words. When they do that, they are interpreting. An example of a Paraphrase is the Living Bible; also, to some extent, I suppose, J.B. Phillips Modern English.

The English Versions with which we are most familiar today are the Authorised Version (King James), the Revised Standard Version, the New International Version, and the New English Bible (not much used in Churches of Christ). I believe I am right in saying that the A.V. has endeared itself to people and is the one most in common use today. There has recently been published a New King James Version.

ERRANT OR INERRANT

Two questions are asked most often of Christians by those who either can't or won't accept the Bible. Some say, "How can you say conclusively that what you say from the Bible is true. It's passed through so many hands that there is bound to be some error". Or, "How can you be sure that the translators interpreted all the words correctly"? These are serious questions which demand some sort of answer.

As I understand it, the Bible is God's revelation of Himself. It is not just a collection of historical facts, nor is it some sort of moral code for living, although both of these are included. It is, rather, a revelation of the mind and the work of God from the Creation onwards. This being the case, we cannot conceive of a situation where God's revelation of Himself could have been in error in any way. Nor could we conceive that the ones by whom the revelation came could have spoken in error; indeed, Paul made this clear when he wrote to Timothy, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God", and among other things it is profitable "for instruction in righteousness". 2 Tim. 3:16. (the reference is to the O.T. scriptures). Peter takes up the same theme regarding prophecy, "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit". 2 Peter 1:19-21. So again, we cannot imagine error having crept in there.

What, however, of the scribes who wrote the words down, and the translators who gave us the different Versions. Were they inerrant in what they did? Whatever we may say or think about this, there is one thing, I believe, that we must hold on to; our God, who took such meticulous care to bring His revelation into being, would not allow it to be so corrupted that it would lead those He was trying to save into confusion and gross error. The trouble arises when people misinterpret the message. This is undeniably true when we consider how many sects and denominations there are in the Christian religion. All, ostensibly, have looked at the same revelation, but many have decided, for reasons best known to themselves, to ignore the plain directives given by the prophets in the O.T. and the Apostles, speaking under the same inspiration, in the N.T. If they have led people into error and confusion, then God will require this at their hands.

WHY DIFFERENT VERSIONS?

For one thing, the meaning of words can change over the years. They no longer say what the King James translators meant them to say. Thus, we have "let" in the sense of "hinder"; "prevent" to mean "precede"; "communicate" for "share"; "take no thought" for "be not anxious", and there are many more. The different Versions, it is said, are an attempt to make the Bible more understandable to modern readers. Personally, I am quite concerned. Grammatical appreciation and expression have been greatly devalued. Our language is becoming desecrated by slang and other expressions frequently heard on television. Books are littered with swear words and descriptions of sexual acts which leave little to the imagination. If this is the only sort of language that many will know, shall we have to produce a Version of the Bible in order to cater for these? As a matter of fact, I read fairly recently that something along these lines is being produced in America. Where will it end.

How far can we go down this road?

As I have said earlier, my individual preference is for the A.V., but I do not consider it to be 'unwise' to use other Versions, especially for study purposes. What I deplore is to hear preachers state an opinionated 'fact' (if that isn't a contradiction in terms) and then search around in the different Versions for a statement which would seem to support their fact; better by far to consult the scriptures and then state the fact which they portray.

The A.V. is written in beautiful prose. I wonder why it is that when preachers quote verbatim from the Bible that they invariably use the text of the A.V.? When I go to Church with my A. Version of the Bible, I find it frustrating when the readings are from another Version; while the mind is grappling with the inter-change of words, the reader is well in advance.

There are many side issues which are germane to this subject, but I hope I have said enough to throw some light on the question.

(All questions, please, to Alf Marden, 20 Costessey Way,
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STANDING ON THE PROMISES

If there is any hope for my life as a Christian, it is as I stand on the promises of God. If there is any hope for the Church in Canada, it will be according as we learn to stand on the promises of God. A good description of faith is: standing on the promises of God.

Standing in this setting implies stability, strength, sensitivity. It means being set for every circumstance: whether to resist temptation, to cope with sadness, to respond to opportunity, or to rejoice in God's presence and provision. Standing means believing, thanksgiving, expecting, being overwhelmed, suffused with joy.

THE GOD OF PROMISE

The Bible's essential communication is that God is a God of promise, that God is the God who keeps his promises, and that those who please him are those who believe his promises.

The covenants of God are essentially pronouncements of God's promises. Paul refers to them as "covenants of promise" (Eph. 2:12). The unfolding of the Biblical story is a sequence of promises fulfilled.

That extended periods of time often occur between promise and fulfilment merely heightens the irresistible truth that "it is impossible for God to lie" (Heb. 6:18). Abraham waited twenty-five years before the promised heir was born. His descendants waited over 800 years before Canaan, "the promised land", was actually theirs. While it took over 600 years to come to pass, God's promise of a punishing exile for the Israelites if they disdained the terms of the covenant given at Sinai became a stark reality for a disobedient people. There was a 450 year silence before God's promise of a forerunner for the promised Messiah given to Malachi came to pass in the person of John (Mal. 3:1). The crown jewel of God's promise to Abraham, that all the world would be blessed through his seed, i.e. Christ (Gal. 3:16), took almost 2,000 years before its fulfilment! But come He did with such a blaze of brilliance that His light has blessed the world ever since.

Men of old were impressed with the surety of God's word. Joshua acknowledged, "So the Lord gave Israel all the land he had sworn to give their forefathers, and they took possession of it and settled there. Not one of all the Lord's good promises to the house of Israel failed; every one was fulfilled" (Josh. 21:43,45). Solomon, at the dedication of the temple, exulted, "Praise be to the Lord, who has given rest to His people just as He promised. Not one word has failed of all the good promises He gave through His servant Moses" (I Kings 8:56).

Abraham's faith is the standard for all his "children" of like faith. Yet, Abraham's faith meant believing implicitly in God's promises - even if his own logic concluded that God's current requirements seemed somehow to be at odds with his major assurances, eg. "sacrifice your son!"

If we would be true children of Abraham it is necessary that we know God's promises to us, that we believe in them, and that we order our lives by their provisions.

VERY GREAT AND PRECIOUS PROMISES

Peter speaks about God's promise to Christians in one of the most encouraging, satisfying, stimulating, and comprehensive statements to be found in the Bible:

"His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness. Through these He has given us His very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires" (2 Pet. 1:3,4).

The Christian's promises are "very great" and "precious". The promises encompass every aspect of the Christian life: "everything we need for life and godliness". Their fulfilment accomplish God's desire for us, that we might "participate in His divine nature", and that we might overcome a sinful world. The source and surety of these promises are found in the divine power of almighty God.

God's promises to Christians are, for the most part, statements of benefits available, ready for our appropriation. Each promise is a sparkling gem of value which has an increasing preciousness in its contemplation, and increasing force in its application.

We neglect the promises of God to our detriment, to God's sadness, and to our ineffectual presence in the world. God promises "forgiveness", but for many the burden of guilt remains. God promises "provisions", but many neglect to pray. God promises "new life", but many walk crabbedly in their old habits. God promises His strength, but feebleness characterizes many. God promises His company, but many are overwhelmed with loneliness.

It is urgent that we learn to stand on the promises of God. We are a covenant people. Let us remember that the covenant of which Christ is mediator "is founded on better promises," (Heb. 8:6). Let us remember, "The promise is to you and your children, and all who are far off - for all whom the Lord our God will call" (Acts 2:39). "Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise" (Gal. 4:28). "For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ. And so through Him the 'amen' is spoken by us to the glory of God" (II Cor. 1:20).

It is an invigorating practice to read the Word with an eye to the promises it contains. It's helpful to underline each one as it is located in the text. The next step is to appropriate each promise in our daily living. Learn. Accept. Believe. Practise. Persist. Prove. Rejoice!

CORE PROMISES

There are 'block-buster' promises in Christ. Seven can be identified at the very core of our Christian faith:

(1) **Pardon** - Ephesians 2:4-10: God has promised to pardon us of our transgressions, because He is merciful and because He has the remedy - His obedient Son. Live in the promise of sins forgiven!

(2) **Presence** - II Corinthians 6:16-7:1: God has promised to dwell among us, and even to live within us through his Spirit. Live in the promise of fellowship with God!

(3) **Provision** - Matthew 6:25-34: All things necessary for spiritual life, godliness, and physical sustenance, are promised by a bounteous God. Claim the promise!

(4) **Productivity** - Corinthians 9:8:11: Always, at all time, in great abundance, God has promised all that we need for every good work. Are we ready to accept this staggering promise?

(5) **Peace** - Philippians 4:4-7: Jesus promised, "In me you may have peace" - even though the world is troublesome (Jn 16:33). Peace, perfect peace, is available for those who rest in the assurance of Christ's promise!

(6) **Power** - Ephesians 3:14-21: Power for the holy life, power beyond all that we might ask or think, is promised. Dare we believe such an astounding promise?

(7) **Perpetuity** - Hebrews 10:35-39: "And this is what he promised us - even eternal life" (I Jn. 2:25). How petty our earthly pursuits in the face of this promise!

God help us to believe your promises, and to live in them!

"Standing on the promises of Christ my King,
Through eternal ages let his praises ring;
Glory in the highest, I will shout and sing,
Standing on the promises of God."

G. ELLIS

MATERIALISM

The Lord's people will never be defeated by an outward foe, like persecution. Indeed, Christianity was born and flourished under severe persecution! As one observer put it, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Kingdom".

But the Church IS in danger of destruction by enemies within. One of the greatest of these enemies is materialism, the attitude that material things of this world are all-important goals in our lives. Paul warns, "To be carnally minded is death . . ." (Romans 8:6).

The basic attitude of materialism is well exemplified by the man who asked Jesus to make his brother divide the inheritance with him (Luke 12:13-21). Jesus refused to be put in such a position, and proceeded to teach a parable on the dangers of selfishly accumulating worldly possessions to the neglect of God's interests.

Covetousness is perhaps the most common form of idolatry in the world today (Colossians 3:5). The love of money may be the most respected of all sins, but this merely disguises its real nature of being the "root of all kinds of evil" (I Timothy 6:10). Nothing divides our allegiance to Christ worse than our over-emphasis on those things that "perish with the using" (II Peter 3:11).

Laying up treasure on earth (Matthew 6:19) is a rather strange practice for those who purport to be "strangers and pilgrims on the earth" (Hebrews 11:13). This is not to say we should make no provision for our own future, or that of others (See Ephesians 4:28, I Timothy 5:8, and 2 Thessalonians 3:10). But this merely makes material possessions a means to a greater end, i.e. laying them up in Heaven (Matthew 6:19-21).

A careful study of Revelation, chapters 13-18, coupled with some understanding of the nature and purposes of the Roman Empire of the first century, should show the utter futility of gaining worldly, material power and wealth. All such endeavour is doomed to destruction with everything material (2 Corinthians 4:16, 2 Peter 3:10-13).

One of the greatest hindrances to evangelizing the word with the Gospel of Jesus Christ is materialistically-minded Church members who have money to buy cars, boats, houses, clothes, etc. but have no money to spend on sending missionaries to other places with the message of Jesus. The Prophet Haggai saw much the same problem in the returned exiles to Jerusalem, living in their "ceiled houses", while the House of God lay waste (Haggai 1:2-4).

It is not easy to quit "trusting in uncertain riches" (I Timothy 6:17), but it is completely necessary to the proper stewardship of the things God has given us. God has blessed us with more material goods than we have ever known before. Are we using these things to bring a blessing to Him and His purposes in the world, or are we selfishly squandering them on ourselves, ignoring His will?

R. DAVIDSON

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Jan 5	2 Kings 1	Mark 3:13-35
Jan 12	Isaiah 6	Mark 4:1-25
Jan 19	Jonah 1	Mark 4:26-41
Jan 26	1 Samuel 16:14-23	Mark 5:1-20

DEMONOLOGY

Let us remember that there are many demons, but there is only one Satan or Devil or Beelzebub, the prince of the demons. Demons were very real to the people in Jesus' day. A demoniac was a person possessed and ruled by a demon. Demon-possession resulted in mental and physical illness. The Scriptures do not say what conditions predispose to such possession.

Jesus, during His ministry, demonstrated clearly His power over the demons. It was a power that He could bestow to His apostles (3:15). His enemies knew He had special powers, but, to offset His influence, they declared "He has Beelzebub and by the prince of the demons He casts out demons" (3:22). The preposterous nature of such a claim was easily exposed by the Master (3:23-27). But those who were saying that He was possessed with an evil spirit (3:30) were beyond the pale as far as Jesus was concerned. "But whoever shall blaspheme against the Holy Spirit has never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation . . ." (3:29). One writer has put it this way: "The blasphemy against the Spirit is to deliberately attribute to Satan the power by which Jesus performed His miracles, against all evidence and for the purpose of deflecting the hearts of humble men and women from faith in Him. The utterance of the slander is simply the result of a malevolent heart, conspiring to defeat the very purpose for which Jesus came in the flesh. It is a wilful decision to scatter what He has come to gather, and the statement is a lie born of the will to deceive".

Can people be possessed with demons today? I would go along with Alexander

Campbell when he wrote: "That demons may still give oracles, as they were wont to do before the Christian era, and possess living men in heathen lands, or in places where Christianity has made little progress, is not altogether improbable. Of this indeed, we have not satisfactory evidence and therefore ought not to speak dogmatically".

JESUS' MOTHER AND BROTHERS

What an experience it must have been to grow up in the family circle of Jesus! His younger brothers are named by Matthew - James, Joseph, Simon and Judas (13:55). Sisters are also mentioned by Matthew (13:56), but they are unnamed. Obviously, Joseph was dead by the time this incident took place (3:31-35). What actually happened to him we will never know this side of heaven.

Little is revealed about Jesus growing up with the family in Nazareth. We have, of course, the events surrounding the visit to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover when He was a lad of twelve (Luke 2:41-50). Luke went on to write: "And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and men" (2:52, N.I.V.). We are left to wonder about all the details.

The greatest family on earth today is the family of God. Personally, I sometimes find it hard to take in that I am a child of God and a brother in Christ Jesus. I am so grateful to my heavenly Father that I have Christian brother and sisters all over the world. They are found in every nation and most of them I have never met. Yet, I love them all because God loves them all. We might not agree on everything (what brothers and sisters do?), but the fact that we are all of the one family puts everything into perspective - or should!

THREE PARABLES

In this section of Scripture, we have three parables recorded - the Parable of the Sower, the Parable of the Growing Seed and the Parable of the Mustard Seed. Each reveals some aspect of the kingdom of God. Mark went on to write: "With many parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand. He

did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when He was alone with His own disciples, He explained everything" (4:33-34, N.I.V.)

A parable has often been described as "an earthly story with a heavenly meaning". Our English word parable is actually from the Greek word which means "to throw alongside". Thus, "a parable is an illustration thrown alongside of a truth in order to explain it. Someone has once said, 'A pound of illustration is worth a ton of explanation'" (Kenneth S. Wuest).

Edward A. Armstrong once wrote: "The parable as an art form and a vehicle for teaching reaches its highest perfection in the parables of Jesus". F. W. Farrar has commented: "The spirit of Christ's parables was in the most supreme degree unique and unparalleled. Nothing distinctly approaching its depth and power, its felicitous brevity and manifold applications, can be produced either from the Old Testament, or from the entire literature of humanity either before or since His life on earth". Albert Barnes once remarked: "Our Saviour's parables are distinguished above all others for clearness, purity, chasteness, importance of instruction and simplicity. They are taken mostly from the affairs of common life, and intelligible, therefore, to all men".

I like the fact that Jesus gives the meaning of the Parable of the Sower in this portion of Scripture (4:14-20). Here is an explanation we can readily accept! The best interpreter of the word is the Word Himself.

JESUS CALMS THE STORM

We had a storm around our way recently. The wind was one of the strongest I have experienced in a long time. It brought back memories of the hurricane that struck Scotland in January, 1968. We could not control the wind then and we cannot control the wind now. It is amazing, therefore, to read of Jesus' power over the wind and the waves in this famous incident in His life. No wonder the disciples were staggered by it all! Just imagine, dear

reader, if you had been numbered with them and had witnessed the miracle: would you not have been equally astonished? Here was proof positive that this man was someone special - that, in fact, he was none other than the Son of God.

THE HEALING OF THE DEMON-POSSESSED MAN

Demons, I believe, were fallen angels. They once dwelt in heaven, but had been cast out because of their rebellion against God (Revelation 12:7-9; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6). During the ministry of Jesus, some of them, at least, appeared to have been released from their imprisonment to assist in the conflict between Satan, the prince of the demons, and Jesus, the Prince of Peace. They knew Jesus because, of course, they had been with Him in heaven. The group name for them was "Legion" (5:9), as they were so numerous. They begged the Prince not to send them back to Tartarus, but to allow them to enter a herd of swine. Permission was given, but the occupation was to no avail. Death of the swine was the result (5:13).

What a change had come over this man! The transformation was from madness to gladness. "Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones . . . they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind, and they were afraid" (5:5,15, N.I.V.). Is it any wonder that he could not help himself broadcast abroad all that Jesus had done for him? (5:20). Oh! that all the saved today would do likewise. It might help transform many a modern Decapolis in the world.

IAN S. DAVIDSON,
Motherwell.

TEST YOUR BIBLICAL KNOWLEDGE

1. What king ended his days as a leper?
2. Who sacrificed his daughter in order to keep a vow?

3. What was the colour of Aaron's robe?
4. What brook was so-called for its grapes?
5. Who was the father of all who "handle the harp and organ?"
6. What prophet spoke the truth when four hundred spoke falsehood?
7. Who was "an Israelite, indeed, in whom is no guile?"
8. Whom did Jesus send to wash in the pool of Siloam?
9. How far was the Mount of Olives from Jerusalem?
10. What great city had Diana as a goddess?

APPEAL FOR INFORMATION

Mike Casey, a professor at Pepperdine University, is wanting to locate and interview Church members who were conscientious objectors in World Wars I & II. Copies of pamphlets, documents, pictures, etc., relating to the CO or war issue are sought. Also needed are the Church journals *Interpreter* (later called *Apostolic Messenger*, and *Biblical Advocate*) and the *Scripture Standard*. His address until April, 1997 is 56 Princes Gate, London. SW7 2PG. Tel. 0171 581 0710.

APPEAL FROM NIGERIA

In the April, 1995, edition of the "S.S." an appeal from brother Emmanuel H. Hokon, was published, in which the brethren of his congregation were asking for urgent help in the construction of their building. They had bought a parcel of land and were moulding bricks, but, as Bro. Hokon said, "The price of building materials is getting out of hand and we would greatly appreciate any financial support you could possibly give us". That was just over a year ago and Bro. Hokon has written again to say that, to date, they have received no help and could a reminder of

their call for help be included in the next edition. This I am most happy to do, and this time I hope that the appeal may catch someone's eye.

Our brother can be contacted at:-

P.O. Box 159,
Badagry, Lagos State,
NIGERIA.
(Ed.)

BREVITIES

By taking revenge a man is but equal to his enemy, but in passing it over he is his superior.

Gratitude is the music of the heart, when its cords are swept with kindness.

The road to hell is paved with good intentions: Life, however short, is made still shorter by the waste of time.

What more of us need is to need less.

Opportunities should never be lost: they can hardly ever be regained.

An honest doubt will yield before the proofs of a fact or a truth: and so there is no excuse for doubting, where we have the means of knowing.

GHANA APPEAL

As some of you know, we have recently had some trouble sending money to Ghana. We are happy to inform the readers of the Ghana appeals that the money has now been located and is in the appropriate Bank accounts. One of the transactions was due to a banking error in this country the other in Ghana.

This month I would like to appeal for solar powered hand lamps for Bible studies and evening worship. These lamps are about 18 inches high and 7 inches in diameter. They are plugged into a light-weight unbreakable solar panel and it takes about 7 hours to charge the lamp. The lamp will give light to the equivalent of a 60 watt bulb for 16 hours or 8 hours at the boost setting which gives the equivalent of a 100 watt lamp. The lamp, solar panel and cables costs £295 (including VAT) each. The bulb life is 5,000 hours. It is shatter-

proof and stormproof with 360° of uniform light. If we could buy a few of these for the remote areas where the Church meets we know they will be greatly appreciated. Having experienced meetings in the dark with a kerosene lamp which gives the equivalent of a 15 watt bulb we know this will be extremely helpful in Bible studies. We take our light so much for granted.

Please make cheques payable to Graeme Pearson (Ghana Appeal), and send to G. Pearson, 13 Fairways, Dunfermline, Fife, KY12 ODU, Scotland. Tel: 01383 728624.

P.S. Thank you IMB for the £100 received on 19/10/96 receipt No. 777.

Thank you Anon for cheque for £500 received 26/10/96 receipt No. 779.

pray, or read their Bibles, or attend worship. Through Paul, Inspiration requires we "be not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord" (Rom. 12:11). That's FERVENT in spirit. In the Greek language, the word simply means to be hot, to boil. It is used metaphorically here in Rom. 12:11 suggesting zeal - *activity*. We have all observed boiling water. It is total activity as it rolls and churns. Paul says the spirit of God's people is to be like that - active, zealous, fervent. Jesus was beginning to catch the spirit at the early age of twelve ". . . I must be about my Father's business" (Luke 2:49). We have accomplished a great deal in the twentieth century, but have "hit a stump" in the Church so far as zeal is concerned. Folk still need to be pushed.

WHEELBARROWS

Wheelbarrows are made to be pushed - automobiles are made to be driven. But, how would you like having to *push* your car everywhere you went? One fellow observed that Church members are often like the "pushed" car. I suppose he made a pretty good comparison. We would likely keep the auto which would require an occasional "push," but we would soon run out of energy and patience if we had to push the old clunker everywhere we went. Makes you wonder how the Lord feels when folk are constantly needing a push to

- 10. Ephesus (Acts 19:26-28).
- 9. A sabbath day's journey (Acts 1:12).
- 8. A man born blind (John 9:1-7).
- 7. Nathanael (John 1:47).
- 6. Micaiah (1 Kings 22:14).
- 5. Jubal (Genesis 4:21).
- 4. Eshtcol (Numbers 13:24).
- 3. Blue (Exodus 28:31).
- 2. Jephthah (Judges 11:29-40).
- 1. Uzziah (2 Chronicles 26:21)

ANSWERS

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