

The SCRIPTURE STANDARD

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

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FRUIT BEARERS

Free men freely work

Whoever fears God fears to sit at ease. (Eliz. B. Browning)

Strawberries are now making their appearance from the many small fruit farms in this locality. The owners of these small farms hire the services of local children to pick the fruit and if the children should be under the impression that they will be getting money for nothing they soon have that impression dispelled. These farmers usually drive a hard bargain with the children and the principle is 'no work, no pay'. Britain as a whole is, at the present time, being nurtured on the proposition that 'only mugs work' and many men get paid more for being idle than for doing any work — a sad situation which gets worse by the minute. Back in the small fruit farms, however, a more basic and down-to-earth set of economic values prevail and the workers are paid by results. Each time one passes these farms and sees the workers stooping and bending over their tasks, sometimes in the hot sun, one is reminded of the fact that quite often in the New Testament the Kingdom of Heaven is likened to a vineyard.

Quite often we refer to the fact that the Kingdom of God is likened unto a vineyard without really appreciating the full implications. A vineyard is a place where work is expected to be done. It is no place for the work-shy. The only one allowed to sit there with his feet up is the owner. In the spiritual reality Jesus owns the vineyard and we are but the labourers. The function of the labourer is to gather and glean the fruit and bring it back to the owner. We are, in short, intended by the Lord to be fruitbearers. Jesus said, "Ye have not chosen me but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit". This was true of his immediate followers but also true of us today. In similar vein the apostle Paul, declared, Wherefore my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God" (Rom. 7:4). We have been released from the law so that we can marry another to what end? "that we should bring forth fruit unto God. The world is God's vineyard. We are in it as His labourers. Our single purpose is to bring forth fruit unto God. Indeed Jesus went just a bit farther and said of those who would bear much fruit, "Herein is my Father glorified that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples". How shall we glorify God? How shall we prove ourselves to be Christ's disciples? By bearing much fruit (John 15:8).

Most men and women produce something — they produce fruit of some kind. In fact, said Jesus, the fruit men bear is a means of the identity of their Lord and Master. If we are motivated by Satan we shall produce the works of the flesh (as described in Gal. 5) but if we are truly the servants of God we shall exhibit the fruit of the Spirit (also described in Gal. 5). which is Love; Joy; Peace; Longsuffering; Gentleness; Goodness; Faith; Meekness and Temperance, against which there is no law. Jesus said, Ye shall know them by their fruits,

do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit". According to this statement, it is not sufficient to be fruitful but to ensure that what we produce falls into the category of 'good fruit'. A moment's thought is enough to remind us that much of the activity of man is begotten by the devil and born in iniquity. The vast bulk of the fruitfulness of man is evil indeed, and Jesus looks to his servants to redress the balance somewhat - by bearing the good fruit. On another occasion Jesus (using a different figure) urged that his disciples might, as salt, savour an otherwise very unsavoury world. Thus, we shall know ourselves by our fruit. The apostle Paul prayed and greatly desired that the disciples at Colosse might be "filled with the knowledge of God's will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding"; that they "might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing"; that they might be "strengthened with all might according to His glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with all joyfulness" and that they might "be fruitful in every good work". Paul didn't limit our activities very much did He? or the choice of our good works when he said, "Be fruitful in every good work". For the disciples at Philippi Paul prayed similarly, i.e. that "their love would abound yet more and more in knowledge and judgement"; that "they would approve things that are excellent"; that "they would be without offence until the day of Christ" and that they would "be filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God". (Phil. 1:10-11). Are we filled with the fruits of righteousness?

It is a well known fact that it is much easier to do that which is evil than to do that which is good, and anyone striving to be fruitful in good works knows the difficulty. How then can we resist the evil and do the good? Jesus deals with the matter in the analogy in John 15:1 where He likens His disciples to branches of a tree (in this case the vine). "I am the vine, ye are the branches". As any schoolboy knows, a branch flourishes and is fruitful only in so far as it derives its sustenance from the sap in the tree. If any branch should be removed from the tree, or in some way fail to receive strength and life from the sap of the tree, it will not yield fruit, and indeed may wither away entirely. Jesus makes the spiritual application of this fact in John 15 when He says, "I am the true vine, and My Father is the husbandman". (verse 4) "Abide in me and I in you. As a branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in Him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing". This surely is the crux of the whole matter. Jesus says we cannot bring forth fruit without His help and assistance. Indeed without Him we can do nothing, and if our lives are bereft of the fruitful works of righteousness then perhaps this is because we have edged away from Jesus. Sometimes the very best of friends just drift apart - and friendships, like dwellings, must constantly be repaired. We shall never be fruitbearers unless we abide in Christ, and draw upon His strength. This of course is all quite easy to say and requires real effort to do. Those of us whose lives are not adorned by much good fruit realise, ourselves, that we are not living close enough to Christ, and His influence is not allowed to shape our deeds and lives. Continuing this imagery of God the husbandmen; Jesus the vine and disciples the branches, our Lord solemnly reminds us of what the husbandman in any vineyard does with branches which persistently are fruitless - he cuts them off. "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit, he taketh away..." and (verse 6) "If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them and cast them into the fire, and they are burned". Jesus, then, in the truest sense of the word, excommunicates from the church those who abide not in Him and who consequently lack fruitfulness in their lives. Think of it.

The world is the vineyard - we are the labourers. There is much to do - there is little time. Jesus hopefully anticipates that His servants will not be found idling their time in the vineyards or watching others work, but will be setting an example to by their fruitful lives.

If we ever get to thinking that too much is being asked of us in God's service, then let us think of the lot which befell the apostle Paul in the Lord's vineyard, "...in labours more abundant (than others), in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of

the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep. In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among brethren, In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, that care of all the churches". (11 Cor. 11:23). EDITOR

APPLES OF GOLD

IN the Bible we have many descriptions of life, its brevity and the use we can make of it. "My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle" (Job 7:6). "We spend our years as a tale that is told" (Psalm 90:9). "For what is your life, it is even a vapour that appeareth for a little while then vanisheth away" (James 4:14). In view of the shortness of our sojourn here in the service of God we should make the most of it, to the praise, honour and glory of God, "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver" (Prov. 25:11). What kind of picture are we painting and framing? the question concerns everyone, old, young and middle-aged. We need artistic hands to paint, but some of our greatest artists paint with their feet because they have no hands. As Christians we paint a picture by the word that we speak and frame it with the lives that we live. In this way reveal our true personality. We are living epistles known and read by all men.

Words are the means by which we convey our thoughts to others, an expression of our inner man. "For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (Mat. 12:34). Words carry a very strong force and the result is either constructive or destructive. In the world today with many nations making atomic bombs, as they meet around the conference table, the wrong word spoken could mean disaster. With words we make glad or sad; impel or repel. "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man" (Col. 4:6) One translation says, "Gracious words, seasoned with salt, having character, not insipid but wholesome and true". Thus with gracious words of character, a Christ-like person can woo and win others for Christ.

Caustic and haughty words hurt and cause suffering. The apostle James refers us to nature itself. "Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter". "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth but that which is good, to the use of edifying that it may minister grace into its hearers". (Eph. 4:29). Jesus taught that dignified words, without sarcasm, grace the personality, they are gracious, true, pure, wholesome and healthy. Our human body grows and thrives under healthy conditions. So to our spiritual life grows day by day with the use of sound words coming from a pure heart. "Sound speech that cannot be condemned that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed having no evil thing to say of you" (Titus 2:8). Is this a characteristic of yours? "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver".

Where do we find the greatest picture painted with the words that He spake, and framed with the life that He lived? at the crucifixion of Jesus. "He was led as a lamb to the slaughter and a sheep before his shearers dumb so he opened not his mouth". Under these adverse conditions how did Jesus react. He was mocked and spat upon. His enemies placed a crown of thorns upon His head, "He saved others, himself he cannot save. If thou be the Christ come down from the cross": passing by they wagged their heads and mocked. With drops of blood trickling down his face and cruel nails driven into His fleshy hands and feet we see His body racked with pain. Instead of giving him water to soothe, they gave him vinegar and gall to drink. In His darkest hour alone, all the forces of hell were hurled against him. Darkness prevailed from the 6th to the 9th hour and, then there emerges from behind the darkness that wonderful picture that throughout the centuries has brought men of every clime and nation to the feet of Jesus. Words out of a pure heart; expressions of the inner man, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do".

"She openeth her mouth with wisdom and in her tongue is the law of kindness" (Prov. 31:26). We acquire knowledge by study, but wisdom comes in answer to prayer. How earnestly, sincerely and regularly we should pray for wisdom. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him" (Jas. 1:5). The old adage says 'Think twice before you speak' yet how often we do not do it because we lack wisdom and kindness. We need wisdom to know what and when to speak and we need kindness to know how to speak. We need wisdom and kindness and chosen words to speak to the sick and the bereaved.

Words – to uplift the spirit of the downcast, to give joy to the sad and love to all. Do we have these attributes in living and speaking? Is your speech gracious, true, wholesome and healthy? When our efforts to attain this ideal in what we say and do are predominated by love then we will wear that Christ-likeness that God so much desires of us. Could your manner of speech be described as "Apples of gold in pictures of silver?"

MY NEIGHBOUR'S BIBLE

I am my neighbour's Bible
he reads me when we meet
today he reads me in my home
tomorrow in the street
He may be a relative or friend
or slight acquaintance be
he may not even know my name
Yet he is reading me

Dear Friends and Christian brothers,
if we could only know
How faithfully the world records
just what we say and do
Oh we would make our record plain
and labour hard to see
our wordly neighbour won for Christ
by reading you and me.

WILLIAM BLACK, Dalmellington.

ASK

"My God! Thy boundless love I praise;
How bright on high its glorious blaze!
How sweetly bloom below!
It streams from Thine eternal throne;
Through heaven its joys for ever run,
And o'er the earth they flow".

"Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us" Ephesians 3:20.

ASK.....WHAT DO I ASK? "The Lord direct your heart into the love of God".

What not again! I can imagine you saying...directing our hearts into the love of God once more. This month will be number six on this theme, but let me say we can never exhaust the subject matter of the love of God. D.L.Moody, tells in one of his sermons, about meeting "what they called "the Boy Preacher". I had read in the papers about "the Boy Preacher", but I did not know this was the one. He introduced himself to me and said he would like to come to Chicago and preach. I looked at him; he was a beardless boy; didn't look as if he was more than seventeen, and I said to myself, "He can't preach". But preach he did, for six nights he preached from the third chapter of John and the sixteenth verse. "The seventh night came and he went into the pulpit. Every eye was upon him. All were anxious to know what he was going to preach about. He said, "My friends, I have been hunting all day for a new text, but I cannot find one as good as the Old one; so we will go back to the third chapter of John and the sixteenth verse", and he preached the seventh sermon from that wonderful text. "God so loved the world". I remember the closing up of that sermon. Said he: "My friends, for a whole week I have been trying to tell you how much God loves you, but I cannot do it with this poor, stammering tongue. If I could borrow Jacob's ladder and climb up into heaven, and ask Gabriel, who stands in the presence of the Almighty, if he could tell me how much love the Father has for the world, all

he could say would be, 'God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life'. The preacher was Henry Moorhouse... if he felt like that ... what can I say?

ASK WHAT DO I ASK? "The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God".

So the message must be sent forth again, GOD IS LOVE. At times of course my faith is put to a severe test, when I see those who I love dearly, suffering intensely, it is then that I have a need to turn to the Word of God, for some of the answers. We shall never know this side of Heaven, all we would like to know, and when we have asked the question over and over again, why? why? why? where else can we go but to the throne of grace, and to the mercy seat. Hold on to that lesson we had some time ago, remember that our Lord Jesus prayed for Peter:— "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not" Luke 22:32. Remember also :— "He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength" Isaiah 40:29. God is love, God loves me, God loves you, but how much are we worth to God?

"OF MORE VALUE THAN A SHEEP!" Matthew 12:12 (RV)

"OF MORE VALUE THAN MANY SPARROWS." Matthew 10:31

"OF MORE VALUE THAN THE GRASS OF THE FIELD".

Well! Well! Well! You may say...this is going from the sublime to the ridiculous, what a comparison...but wait...remember the one who is giving us this lesson.. "His name shall be called... Counsellor" Isaiah 9:6.

"If then God so clothe the grass, which is to day in the field, and tomorrow is cast into the oven; how much more will he clothe you, O ye of little Faith". Luke 12:28.

Can you get hold of this glorious message - you - are important - with these simple but profound messages given to us by the Lord Jesus, He is telling us how much we are worth to His heavenly Father. Of more value than a sheep, of more value than many sparrows. HOW MUCH MORE than the grass of the field.

May I quote J.H. Jowett on the above text:— "I am to take a blade of grass, and contemplate it, and from the suggestions it conveys to me reason upward to a larger and truer conception of God. Have you ever gazed at a blade of grass? I don't mean have you merely glanced at it; but have you taken it up and feasted your eyes upon it until its exquisite beauty is for ever imprinted upon your soul? "Think of it well", says John Ruskin, "and judge whether of all the gorgeous flowers that beam in summer air, and of all strong and goodly trees, pleasant to the eyes, or good for food - stately palm and pine, strong ash and oak, scented citron, burdened vine, - there be any by man so deeply loved, by God so highly graced, as that narrow point of febble green". Contemplate, therefore, a blade of grass. Examine the exquisite robes of a lily. Take one of the commonplaces of the ordinary field. Look long at the daisy, or the buttercup, or a sprig of moorland heather. And when your vision is possessed by the ineffable loveliness, call to mind the Scriptural reasoning, "If God so clothe the grass of the field, how much more shall He clothe you". Give to the reasoning its largest reaches, Don't confine the suggestions to merely temporal vestures. Lift it up to include the robing of the Spirit. When I turn to the Word of God, I find descriptions of most wonderful clothing, "Robes of righteousness". "Garments of Salvation". "Who are these in white robes?" "Garments of praise". These phrases describe the lovely clothing of a hallowed and perfected life. May I have my spiritual nakedness covered by their surpassing beauty? I obtain the inspiring answer from the common field. If God takes so much pains with a blade of grass, how much more will He take with one of His own children. The exquisiteness of a flower of the field gives me hope that, through the grace of God, I may one day be a flower in His kingdom. The beauty of nature shall make me confident of obtaining the beauty of holiness".

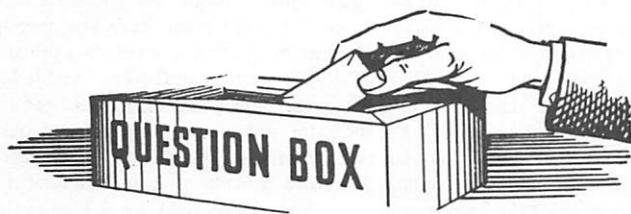
ASK WHAT DO I ASK? "The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God".

If you are a child of God, take this lesson of "HOW MUCH MORE" and allow it to become a rich blessing to your soul. GOD IS LOVE - and God loves His children. Remember He is a Father - the Lord Jesus teaching His disciples said:— "After this manner therefore

pray ye: Our Father". Matthew 6:9. He also said:- "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" Matthew 7:11. Did you notice the words again:- "HOW MUCH MORE". If we ask aright, according to His will, if we are abiding in Christ, if we ask in the name of the Lord Jesus, we can approach the throne with boldness making our requests known to the One who is able to meet all our needs through Christ Jesus our Lord. Let us keep our priorities right - the things that matter are the things which our heavenly Father can give us, to enable us to go through this pilgrimage fortified by spiritual resources that are available for those who are faithfully striving to do His will, "HOW MUCH MORE". What is it that you want? do you want power? well we have already quoted from Isaiah 40, here is His promise again, "He giveth power to the faint". Do you want strength?:- "To them that have no might he increaseth strength". Do you want more grace? :- "For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many rebound to the glory of God". 2 Cor. 4:15. "The grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus" 1 Timothy 1:14.

Do you want more mercy?:- "For thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee". Psalm 86:5. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead". 1 Peter 1:3. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon". Isaiah 55:7. Do you want to have life at its best? something extra:- "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly". John 10:10. Do you want more satisfaction?:- "They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures". Psalm 36:8. "HOW MUCH MORE". ASK..... WHAT DO I ASK? "The Lord direct your hearts into the Love of God".

May the Lord's richest blessing be your portion. LEONARD MORGAN.



Conducted by
Alf Marsden

"I HAVE often heard preachers say that we should live by faith, and I have never understood completely what this means. Could you please explain, in terms of the christian life, what the phrase 'we live by faith' really means?"

I AM glad that the questioner has had the courage to ask a question like this. I sue the word 'courage' advisedly because on the face of it some would say, "Surely you know what faith is", and by the tone of voice they would imply that the one who asked the question was in some way mentally deficient, or intellectually incapable. But I am persuaded that many such nebulous statements are made in sermons, talks, and discussions, and because the listeners don't want to appear to be ignorant, they let the statements pass without any real understanding, indeed, in many cases, the speakers would find it a little difficult to explain in detail some of the statements which roll off the tongue so easily and glibly. However, as we have said so often in the past, the Bible is the best explainer of the doctrine it contains, and as always, we must turn to it for enlightenment.

The foundations of faith

If we examine our lives in fundamental detail, I think we shall find that we live according to propositions which we either accept or reject. Every day we have to make decisions and judgments, and these will be based, in faith, on what we see and understand as the meaning of life. When a person accepts what he considers to be fundamental and absolute truth, he does so in faith; there is no way in which he can prove it. Conversely, an atheist must rely on a faith that there is no God, because he cannot prove that his assumptions are valid. There is no way in life that we can avoid decisions of faith. When people attend meetings and hear a powerful gospel address we sometimes say; "Well how can they leave without making a decision after a gospel message like that?" But they do make a decision; even a decision to do nothing is a decision of faith on their part. How, then, are we to be guided? On what does the christian base his decisions, and how does the christian faith commend itself?

First of all there is the Bible. The Bible needs friends, not enemies, but unfortunately many of its so-called friends have practiced textual vivisection on it, they have quoted it out of context; they have used it as a bludgeon to beat their opponents into submission, but they have not seen it as the living embodiment of their own faith. No one would deny that the Bible exists. Nor would they deny that it speaks about God's intervention in the affairs of men in the person of His Son, Christ Jesus. The authority and integrity of the biblical records and documents have stood up to the most rigorous and searching criticism. No miraculous claim is made for the Bible; it stands on its own. There is no way of going beyond or behind what the apostles said in the New Testament. The Bible when taken as a whole has extraordinary unity; it is completely meaningful when the voices of prophets and apostles are taken together. The christian sees it as the supreme embodiment of his faith, and he preaches and teaches from it as a commendation of his faith to others.

Secondly, another fact to commend the christian faith to people is the Church. You might be excused for thinking that a hopelessly divided Church would be the last thing for commending the christian faith, many people have been turned away from christianity because of divisions in the church. But such an argument surely misses the point; from the beginning of christianity, those who have 'been obedient to the faith' have been the Church. That is a fact; and a world which seems to judge from facts should read the second chapter of Acts of Apostles. Furthermore, if being 'obedient to the faith' means being obedient to the teaching of the Bible, and if obedience to the teaching of the Bible regarding God and Christ results in entry into the Church then the authority and integrity of the Church is just as well attested to as that of the Bible. So the christian now has two facts to commend his faith to others; the Bible and the Church.

There is a third and, perhaps, most vital fact, and that is the inner conviction of the christian that he is a new creation in Christ Jesus. It is comparatively easy to teach people about the Bible and the Church, but how do I set about communicating the faith that I have to someone else? The christian is, as Peter says, 'a partaker of the divine nature'. He is a recipient of the Holy Spirit, and it is the Holy Spirit who confirms to the christian that what he has believed about the Bible and the Church is absolutely true. This is what gives the inner conviction. It seems to me that all can be summated in the reception of Christ Jesus into the individual life; He is the true embodiment of the christian faith. The Bible teaches Jesus; the Church worships and elevates His name; and the Holy Spirit testifies to Him. Paul could say, "And the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me". (Gal. 2:20). Perhaps we are now in a position to say what we mean by the statement, 'we live by faith'.

Worth believing

Surely the christian who lives by faith must inevitably come to the conclusion that what he has believed is worth believing, especially when he contrasts his christian beliefs with what the world asks him to believe. Let us examine two of the most fundamental beliefs.

1 "For he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him" (Heb. 11:6). Is that worth believing? To believe that the uncreated

Creator loves me and cares for me so much that He was willing to intervene to save me from sin and death; that is a belief which thrills the heart. To believe that before time was, God is, and that such a majestic and timeless God can be my heavenly Father, is more than the mind can grasp. Is there anything better than to live by faith toward such a God and Father?

2 "She saith unto him, Yea, Lord; I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world" (John 11:27). Is what Martha believed and confessed worth believing? The disciples evidently thought so because to them he became life; and so he does to all who believe and accept him in obedience to the gospel. They saw him compassionately moving among the people; they marvelled at the gracious words that fell from his lips; their hearts bled with grief when they saw him at the place of execution. They loved him because they knew that he loved them, and that he had come into the world to freely bestow that love to all mankind, especially to those who would respond to it. Is Jesus worth believing on? Let Peter answer, "Unto you therefore which believe he is precious" (1 Peter 2:7). Indeed he is.

Worth doing

To live by faith is, I believe, to lose our will in God's will. The christian should not need to ask if this is worth doing. The tragedy is, of course, that many times we are intent on fulfilling our physical appetites to the detriment of our spiritual appetites. Once when the disciples begged Jesus to eat, he said to them, "I have meat to eat that ye know not of" (John 4:32-34). The disciples wondered at this and asked if anyone had brought him food, but Jesus elaborated, "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work". Evidently Jesus found God's will worth doing, and so should we.

Doesn't the Bible teach us about the foolishness of being self-willed? We sometimes strut about the stage of life as if we were the principal actors; our egos and knowledge are, in our own estimation, of paramount importance. We should listen to what Jesus says, "I can of my own self do nothing: as I hear I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will. but the will of the Father which hath sent me" (John 5:30). Sweet will of God! Jesus realised that without God his mission on earth could not prosper. How dare we, spiritual pygmies as we are when compared to Jesus, think that we can accomplish great things in our own strength? Is it worth doing to live by faith in such a God? Why are we not willing to rest in the everlasting arms? How vociferously we sing "I surrender all", and yet our "all" represents only the crumbs from the table. Have we forgotten that He, out of the munificence of His glory, has dispensed to us blessings that we could never have achieved for ourselves; could never even have dreamed of. Let Paul teach us, "And be not conformed to this world; but ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God". (Rom. 12:2). Is it worth doing, to live by faith? We shall find so when we are willing to prove His will in our lives.

Worth becoming

To live by faith is not an irksome task, especially when we appreciate that by so doing we are walking the highway to glory. We do well to remember our former estate; as Paul put it to the Ephesians, "at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: But now in Christ Jesus ye who some-times were afar off are made nigh by the blood of Christ" (Eph. 2:12,13). Was it worthwhile to become a child of God? Are there as many of our deposits in the Bank of Heaven as there are in the vaults of the secular banks here upon earth? God not only sees us as we are, but He sees us as we can become by His divine grace and power. Stunted growth, or magnificent spiritual development: which shall it be? I can do no better than to echo the words of John, "Beloved, now are we the Sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure" (1 John 3:2,3).

Yes, 'to live by faith' may not always be easy; it may even result in hardship, but as Paul says, 'For I reckon that the suffering of this present time is not worthy to be compared

with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18). Is, then, the christian faith worth the attitude of Paul, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me. and gave himself for me". (Gal. 2:20). Even so, Lord Jesus, even so.

(All questions please to Alf Marsden, 377 Billinge Road, Highfield, Wigan, Lancs.)

SCRIPTURE READINGS

SEPTEMBER 1978

- Sept. 3 Exodus 20, 1-17. John 7, 1-24
 10 Isaiah 1, 10-31. John 7, 25-36
 17 Micah 5. John 7, 37-52
 24 Daniel 9, 1-19. John 8, 1-30

THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES

Under the law of Moses there were three feasts of divine appointment. The first was the Passover which began the year, the second Pentecost when the first fruits were offered and consecrated, and the last the feast of Tabernacles or booths, celebrating the final gathering of harvest. Approximately they would be in our months April, June and September respectively. Tabernacles was the feast of rejoicing; the harvest thanksgiving. Every adult male Jew was obligated to attend all three feasts, and although there was a limit of twenty miles, Jews came from all over the world in the time of Jesus.

Jerusalem would be very much overcrowded. Booths were erected anywhere and everywhere, roofs of houses, streets and outside the walls.

The feast in our readings appears to have been the last before our Saviour was crucified. We assume Jesus did attend all the feasts during His ministry of about 3½ years and had become famous for His words and deeds both in Jerusalem but more so in Galilee. His brothers witnessed His wonderful works in that region where the greatest of them were done, and having we suppose the popular conception of the Messiah suggested Jerusalem as the place where He should manifest Himself with the uttermost publicity. Jerusalem had now become a very dangerous place for Jesus. It was nothing to the brothers, but for Jesus it would be "the den of lions."

He did of course get the maximum of publicity when in the midst of the festival He went into the Temple and taught. Had Jesus wanted to stir up rebellion under His standard Jerusalem was the place and a feast the time, and miraculous works the motive power. This was not His mission. The "Jews" (John's name for the opponents of Jesus) had no respect for the people ("this people is cursed" — 7,49) and were afraid of them. The mixture of belief and unbelief in the minds of the brothers is perhaps hard to understand. The holy childhood and manhood of Jesus must have deeply impressed them, and they were undoubtedly amazed at His power. No publicity was given respecting His birth. Mary must very truly have "kept all these sayings in her heart" Luke 2,51. Both the people and the rulers "knew" that He came from Galilee (7,27 & 52).

"The last day, the great day of the feast" was the day when very special ceremonials were practised. Water drawn from the pool of Siloam was poured out upon the great altar while the people stood around the courts. At that very time Jesus stood forth and uttered the striking words "if any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink," involving His claim to be the Messiah.

WHAT THE PEOPLE THOUGHT

The question in all minds was "Where is HE." Reading the gospels as we do so often, have we grasped the extent of the influence of the ministry of Jesus? Peter looking back to this time when preaching in the house of Cornelius (at Caesarea be it noted) said "that saying ye yourselves know," "Jesus of Nazareth, how that God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power ..." Acts 10,38.

The work and the time was well known then, and of course was being further spread around by the early preaching of the gospel. Every Jew was living in expectation of relief from Roman domination anyway, but the penniless prophet from Galilee did not fulfil their thoughts at all. A sign from heaven or a call to action was hoped for, and did not come. Action upon and in the heart of the individual was indeed called for by both John Baptist and Jesus. Ob-

viously the common people perceived that their interest in Jesus did not please their rulers (7.13).

They did not have designs in the life of Jesus (7.20) but their rulers did, and the teaching and answers Jesus gave when questioned led them to order His arrest. To them he was an ignorant upstart untrained by the Rabbis but they could not contradict or even rival the truth and force of what He taught. Envy and fear was their motive and even when challenged by one of their own party (Nicodemus) they were not prepared to listen and consider His claims. They could not prevent some of the people "believing", but some were decided that He was a blasphemer and would have used violence. The truth divides right-thinkers from wrong-thinkers, and the latter fall back on violence. Here "chief priests and Pharisees" combine against Jesus while otherwise hating one another. In dominating the Temple by teaching He was offending equally the politicians and the religious authorities. The observance of the Sabbath seems to have been the point on which emphasis was placed by the authorities, while place of birth provides another excuse for unbelief. The first point Jesus deals with effectively in showing that the ordinance of circumcision so much valued involved breaking the Sabbath law, at least according to their method of interpretation. How easy it is to become pedantic? The law of "love to neighbour" is as obligatory as observance of an ordinance.

DIVINE AUTHORITY

The claim of this by Jesus is repeatedly put forward in this month's readings. Those to whom He spoke did indeed realise this, and not believing it to be true, regarded Him as a blasphemer.

How true it is that He was either exactly what He claimed to be or else that. Taking up stones to stone Him was then the expected reaction.

The "officers" knew this and some part of the crowd around them had already reacted in this way and had failed to carry out their intention because "His hour was not yet come" (7.30). The outstanding reason for this must have been two-fold. First there was a division among the people. We remember the Chief Priests said "Not on the feast day" (Matt. 26.5) because they feared the people. Secondly, the words of Jesus had such power upon the minds of the listeners. There was a sense in which they wanted to do God's will, so they were held back from their purpose. (7.17). Ultimately the reason was that "the destined hour of God" (Barclay) had not come (John 2.4: 7.30: 8.20: & 12.27). A different word is used in 7.8 indicating rather "opportunity" than "destiny".

Jesus said that His teaching was God's not His own thus claiming divine authority for His own words. Further He refers again and again to God as the Father, identifying Himself with Him, and uses the divine name "I AM" twice in chapter 8 verses 24 and 28, and finally claims eternal life in verse 58 "before Abraham was, I AM." This last reference being so obvious a claim to identity with God Himself that "He hid Himself" — to avoid being stoned there and then — because His time had not yet come. We feel inadequate to appraise the supreme courage of Jesus in teaching as He did in the stronghold of what He knew was a false religion bound to react with hatred against righteousness, purity and love. Nevertheless there was as ever the remnant there present which took that utterly right religion to heart, and that would react to the glory of God — as it did at Pentecost, and does now.

R. B. SCOTT.

YOUNG LADY, MARRY A CHRISTIAN BEFORE any young lady marries a non-christian, she should consider the following problems which often face the Christian in a mixed marriage.

1 Problems in attending services.

She should ask herself, "What will I do if my husband some Lord's day drives away in the car, leaving me with no transport to the service?" "What will I do if my husband announces that his company is moving us to some city where no church of the Lord meets? Many women have faced these problems.

2 Problems in giving

The young lady loves the Lord and His work, and wants to give liberally in support of it. Her husband, however, does not share her convictions. He feels that a dollar is plenty to give.

3 Problems in training children.

Some have succeeded in bringing up their children to be Christians without the help of their companions. Eunice succeeded with Timothy. But the influence of a father is great, and many are the women who have not been able to overcome this influence to see their children become christians.

4 Problems in overcoming the influence of one's companion.

Marrying with the hope of reforming one's companion is a dangerous thing. Often

the companion is lifted to a higher standard, but seldom to the standard of a Christian. Instead, as the non-Christian's standards are raised, the Christian's standards are lowered, so that the two meet somewhere in between. The young lady should realise that the man she marries will be the greatest earthly influence on her life, and she should ask herself, "Will this man help me to go to heaven?"

5 Emotional Problems.

Recently a godly woman, having just received word of her husband's death in an automobile accident, cried, "Why couldn't it have been me or the children, for my husband was not ready to die?"

Is the reader thinking she will convert her husband after marriage? She may be able to do so, but statistics show that her chances are not very good. The risk is too great. The only safe course is for Christians to marry Christians.

Bill Hall.

ANSWERED PRAYER

"Give me more love to Thee, O Lord!" you cried.

Yet when friends failed you, cast your love aside,

You did not see, at first, that only so
Your love to Him would deeper, warmer grow.

You asked that you might be a Christian strong
Temptation came: a battle fierce and long
You fought, and conquered in His strength alone,
And, in the conquering, stronger you have grown.

"Lord, give me faith," you said.
And you were thrust

Into such darkness that you had to trust,
No ray appeared to guide you in the least,
But in the gloom, with Christ, your faith increased.

You prayed, "On earthly things my hold is keen,
Lord make me to desire the 'things unseed',"
Earth's treasures left you; one by one they passed,
The things you long for now are those that last
We thank Thee, Lord, because, in Thine own way,
Our prayers are being answered every day.

by MARY E. TONGUE

'They Say...'

"THEY say!"—ah, well, suppose they do!
But can they prove the story true?
Why count yourself among the "they"
Who whisper what they dare not say?

Suspicion may arise from naught
But malice, envy, want of thought,
"They say!"—but why the tale rehearse,
And help to make the matter worse?

No good can possibly accrue
From telling what may be untrue,
And is it not a nobler plan
To speak of all the best you can?

"They say!"—well, if it should be so,
Why need you tell the tale of woe?
Will it the bitter wrong redress,
Or make one pang of sorrow less?
Will it the erring one restore,
Henceforward to "go and sin no more"?

"They say!"—Oh, pause and look within,
See how thy heart inclines to sin;
And lost in dark temptation's hour
Thou, too, shouldst sink beneath its power,
Pity the frail, weep o'er their fall,
But speak of good or not at all.

NEWS FROM THE CHURCHES

Cape town, R.S.A.: I am still quite busy in my 'travelling Evangelist' status, teaching in homes of families, making appointments accordingly conducting services at the City Chest Hospital Green Point Cape Town, visiting, preaching, teaching and assisting at various of our local congregations. Even to the congregations in our Northern suburbs where I will be preaching in August and September, (this congregation is in Kraaifontein, about 20 miles or more from my apartment in Cape Town). Have been requested to conduct a gospel Campaign during the month of September 1978 Lord willing, with the Steenberg congregation 12 miles from my apartment, they meet in a private home. So I ask you one and all to kindly share in your prayers on my behalf, that God might grant me the grace and the strength as I do His will, and to the intent that it might be the result of a "rich harvest" to the Glory of God". T. W. HARTLE.

QUOTES ON -ALMS

The word 'Alms' has no singular, as if to teach us that a solitary act of charity scarcely deserves the name. Anonymous.

Alms are but the vehicles of prayer.

John Dryden.

Time hath, my Lord, a wallet at his back,

Wherein he puts alms for oblivion

A great-sized monster of ingratitude;

These scraps are good deeds past,

which are devour'd

As fast as they are made forgot as soon as done.

Shakespear (Troillus & Cressida)

His alms were money put to interest

In the other world.

Robt. Southby

BAPTISMAL ROBES

IF any brethren know of any firm which supplies baptismal robes, would they be so kind as to supply the name and address of the company to the editor. Thank you.

WHICH DISTURBS YOU MOST?

A sermon five minutes too long, or lunch a half hour late? The need of a good lesson, or the need for a new garment? Your missing worship service, or missing a day's work? Your

Bible unopened, or your income decreasing? An unpaid bill from a merchant, or an unpaid contribution to the church? Church work neglected, or housework neglected? Your children late for church, or late for public school? To miss church, or miss your favourite TV or radio programme? Low attendance at worship service, or low attendance at a club meeting? A rainy Lord's day, or a rainy work day? A lazy employee, or your laziness in God's service? Your child rebelling against you, or your rebellion against God? A soul lost in hell, or a scratch on a new car? Does it disturb you to give God second best?

TWO PRAYERS

Last night my little boy

Confessed to me

Some childish wrong;

And kneeling at my knee

He prayed with tears;

"Dear God, make me a man

Like Daddy - wise and strong;

I know you can".

Then while he slept

I knelt beside his bed,

Confessed my sins,

And prayed with bowed head;

"O God, make me a child,

Like my child here -

Pure, guileless

Trusting Thee with faith sincere".

Author Unknown

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