

The SCRIPTURE STANDARD

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

VOL.52 No.4

APRIL 1984

GODLY GROWTH

OUR lives are circumscribed by *dimensions* - by *measurements*. Everything has a value in terms of feet, inches, yards, ounces, pounds, tons, pints, quarts, gallons (or the metric equivalent of those) to say nothing of nautical miles; kilowatts; Horse Power; Centigrade and Fahrenheit; Specific Gravity; Foolsap; Hogsheads; Lightyears; Per Cent; semi-quavers; Richter Scale; pounds, shillings, pence, seconds, minutes, days, weeks, months, etc. etc. Likewise the men of Bible times dealt in cubits; spans; furlongs; talents; mites; shekels; farthings; firkins; Homers; ephahs etc. etc. Evidently man, early on, discovered that time, money, land, food and liquids must all be quantified so that things produced (usually by mother earth) could be measured, and also so that any increase or diminution could be noted. The earth was expected and intended to "yield her *increase*". "Increase" and "profit" were not dirty words in Bible times. Certainly God condemned profits unlawfully gained, as by a false balance or by the dishonest exploitation of the labourers. God gave the increase and indeed all Creation was specifically designed to "Be fruitful and multiply". Think, for instance, of the hundreds of tiny seeds one poppy will produce, or the millions of magnificent bison which roamed the plains of America, until they were virtually all butchered in recent times. True, there are the counterweights to progress, such as droughts, murrain, locusts, canker, weeds and thistles. Things, after all, must not be made too easy for man, the husbandman. Nevertheless with a little initiative, guile and hard labour it was, and is, possible for man to prosper on this globe - there is enough for all - even for the Third World.

Unhealthy?

Some have the idea that the desire to prosper, make profits, or to increase in goods is not only unhealthy but contrary to God's will. Paul certainly said that he was content in whatever state he might find himself, and Paul also advised the Hebrew Christians that they should be without covetousness and be content with such things as they had. Paul rightly condemns coveting the goods of others but surely he was not advocating lethargy, laziness or disinterest in our personal circumstances or in our environment. Surely Paul was not smothering the passion for self-improvement that man has within him? Surely Paul was not saying that if a man *had nothing* that he should be content with that? Paul also taught that if a man *would not work* neither should he eat, and advocated that thieves should work so that instead of taking from others they would have somewhat *to give to*

others. And surely if the New Testament teaches anything it teaches self-respect, human dignity, honest self-improvement, and advocates that all men strive to enhance the wellbeing, and living environment of all others. Christians should be in the forefront of efforts to feed the starving in India and Africa, and the homeless, stateless millions in refugee camps. If we were all penniless we would certainly be of little help to the needy. Jesus did not say that money was the root of all evil but rather that it was *the love* of money that was to be condemned. I know that when Jesus spoke the parable of the talents he was applying the expected behaviour of commerce to spiritual things - but the parable does not seem to condemn commercial activity, or the prospering in business - but rather seems to endorse it. Indeed the economic stability of every country depends upon business transactions in the market place, and the quest for 'increase'.

A Universal Pre-occupation

Most normal people are interested in their own personal well being - their 'increase' in whatever sphere their interests lie. Those who desire to increase in knowledge cram the colleges and Universities. Some desire to pursue physical prowess and spend hours with the bell-bars and chest-expanders. Little boys keep marking their height on the wallpaper hoping for rapid progress. Some live solely to increase their Bank-balance and work long hours and sacrifice all leisure. Others seek only to increase their time for leisure, or pleasure. Some spend sleepless nights scheming their way into a position of power or influence. Others older, like grandparents, seek only the prosperity of their children, or grandchildren, and hope, perhaps, that their offspring will have opportunities that they (the grandparents) never had. Surely the vast bulk of human activity is geared to this end - that each in his own way pursues that which he reckons to be of value (whether it be the sinking of a village-well in India or the building of new stables for the race-horses, in Britain). Obviously our priorities change as we go through life, as we learn more and as our experience broadens. At some stage in life the little boy who measured his height on the lounge wallpaper will become so big and fat that he will be scared to stand on the bathroom scales. Thus not all 'Increase' is welcome, or good for us. The increase of power achieved by Adolf Hitler was bad for him, and even worse for the world. The 'increase' in wealth of Howard Hughes was his undoing, for he died an unhappy and befuddled recluse. The youth with the bell-bars and chest-expanders will eventually agree with apostle Paul that "bodily exercise profiteth little", or with Jesus that "no man, taking thought, can add one cubit to his stature."

The Increase of God

God is the true source of all increase whether in the natural world or the spiritual world. He has ordained certain laws in the natural world and, provided farmers observe these laws and give seeds light, earth, air and moisture, the crops will unerringly appear. However at the end of the day man is but the instrument (like the spade) - GOD, and God alone is responsible for the increase. It was God who placed the spark of life in the seeds and it was God who 'programmed' the plants to throw out the leaf and then the ear. Precisely the same principle operates in the *Spiritual world*. This is surely the point Paul makes to the Christians at Corinth when he discovers that they are all in little factions, calling themselves after their favourite preacher (i.e. some were 'Of Paul' and some 'Of Apollos') "Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered: but God gave the increase. So then, neither is he that planteth anything, neither

he that watereth: but God that giveth the increase." (1 Cor. 3:5-7). The gospel is God's appointed power unto salvation - it is supercharged with God's Spirit and with Life everlasting - but those who bring the good news are merely God's instruments; those who sow the incorruptible seed merely husbandmen in God's earthly vineyard. GOD, alone, is responsible for the increase. Once again however the rules and laws must be observed. *Only the good seed* must be sown. Many perversions of Christ's gospel are being preached in the world today, and many large religious cults have emerged, but God is *not responsible for their increase* - these are plants which He has not planted, and which in due course "will be rooted up".

Today there is a striking increase in the numbers entering some denominations and into many of the, often weird, religious cults. We hear them giving thanks to God, in their prayers, for their numerical success, and perhaps some might even envy them. This is true, perhaps, of Baptists, Mormons, Jehovah Witnesses, Pentecostals, Bahai World Faith etc. etc. A neighbour of mine, A Jehovah Witness, used to tell me that he knew J.W.'s were the true church because they were growing so rapidly in numbers; and God was blessing them so much. I suppose that if numbers were any criterion the Roman Catholic Church should be the true church. Would anyone blame God for the state of the religious world today? Does God give increase in numbers to the 'Moonies', 'Scientologists', 'Hare Krishna', 'Zen Buddhists', 'Black Muslims', 'Satanists' etc. etc.? Growth in numbers *is absolutely no guide whatsoever* as to whether God has given the increase, or whether such growth is, in reality, a stench in God's nostrils. God has little time, I suspect, for 'the fastest-growing denominations in the world'. 'Churches of Christ' may be tempted to enter the competition for big numbers, and advance all kinds of 'gimmicks' to 'attract people in', and attract especially 'the young people'. I am sure the apostles were never motivated by any such desire and would have rejected any such suggestion. If 'converts' do not enter the Kingdom of God *for the right reasons*, they are better not to enter at all. We should certainly strive to save men in very large numbers, but *numbers alone* in no sense denotes that God approves of us, or that we are the 'true church'.

Legitimate Increase

I suppose that if we were to give each visitor to our meetings a £10 note we could soon fill the building, or if we were to adapt the message to suit our hearers we could soon have an enthusiastic following. At the end of the last war some churches very generously handed out food-parcels to the starving German population and undoubtedly this kindness attracted some who were more interested in "the loaves and fishes" than in the gospel message. Human nature being what it is, such is inevitable and we should strive to see that no possible worldly inducements (of any nature) should superimpose themselves upon the fact that Christ came into the world to save sinners. In some countries there are Churches of Christ congregations which seem to bear more resemblance to a 'Country Club', or sports complex, or social centre than to the spiritual body of the risen Christ. The church at Laodicea reckoned that they "were rich, and increased with goods, and had need of nothing" whereas Jesus said, "they were wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" (Rev. 3:17). We could all fall into the trap into which these Laodicean brethren fell. Obviously they had the wrong priorities. They had sought self-sufficiency, material prosperity, financial independence, and having obtained it began to forget the reason for their existence.

What then is the way forward for the churches, and how shall they seek legitimate increase? Paul's teaching on the subject, to the Ephesians, runs thus, "But speaking the truth in love, (we) may grow up into Him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body, fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love". (Eph. 4:15, 16). He gives similar advice to the church at Colosse when he says that they must "Hold fast the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God." (Col. 2:19).

Both these passages speak of the church increasing with "the increase of God". How is this legitimate growth to be achieved? What does Paul say?

- 1 Christians must 'Hold fast to their Head - even Christ.
- 2 They must preach **THE TRUTH** — (only the truth).
- 3 They must speak the truth **IN LOVE** — (truth and love together).
- 4 They must **GROW UP** — into Christ in **ALL THINGS**.
- 5 They must be 'fitly joined together' (compacted together) — true **UNITY**.
- 6 Every part of the Body **MUST BE EFFECTUAL** — (*every member*).
- 7 Every member must make increase of the Body **BY WORKING**.
- 8 The church must *edify itself* in love — (mutual edification by all).

Paul says that the above recipe will 'increase' the Body and we can see, at once, that this list is a far cry from our two meetings per week (in some cases just one meeting per week)? Do we always 'Hold fast to our Head' (Christ)? Do we preach the truth, or is the 'incorruptible seed' still lying in the sack. Even farmers know not to expect a harvest if they haven't scattered any seed. Do we grow up in Christ - do we reach any spiritual maturity, or are we still babes in Christ and on a milk diet? Are we 'fitly joined together' in unity, or more like squabbling children, estranged with petty bickering? Can a family afford to argue while their house is burning down? Is every part of the Body effectual? The talents (great or small) of every church member must be harnesses - we must all try to be effective within the compass of our ability. We can't contract to pay someone to do it for us - the whole Body (the church) must achieve "An effectual working in the measure of *every part*". In reality, and sadly, only a few members work; while the others watch and occasionally throw in a criticism. How can we, in such circumstances, look for progress? *Every church* member must strive to be **EFFECTUAL**, says Paul, and the church must also **EDIFY ITSELF** in love.

Self analysis is a good thing, and so is a consideration of lack of progress in the church. Surely we must know that if our concept of 'work' is two meetings per-week we shall never deserve progress. One sows, and one waters, but God gives the increase. Even God can't give an increase if no-one sows and no-one waters. In the main denominational bodies, such as the Church of Scotland, the members do no 'witnessing' or 'working' in God's vineyard because they prefer to jointly pay someone to do the work in their stead. Usually the paid person is reckoned 'better qualified' to do this spiritual work he has, after all, had a University training. This seems, to me, to be a far cry from Paul's injunctions to the church at Ephesus or Colosse. We should try to be realistic as to where the blame lies with any lack of 'progress' in the churches, but I hope no one will espouse the 'numbers game' and enter into competition with the denominations. Such a step might be popular but also fatal. I believe, after all, that God is far better pleased with a

congregation of six faithful disciples (with never a College degree between them) than with 6,000 Jehovah's Witnesses, 'Moonies' or Mormons. Let us seek to sow the seed, and water it (effectively) so that God can give an increase.

EDITOR

GLEANINGS

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

A CONQUEROR OR A CAPTIVE

"There are two sides to character; one so evil, fallen, strengthless, that at times it is on the brink of hell; and one which is risen with Christ: which brings us sometimes to the very verge of heaven: which makes us almost feel the breath of God is breathing upon us, and that we hear the harpings of the everlasting harps! The true Christian spirit is one of mingled loftiness and humility - of majesty and abasement; now with the stride of a conqueror and a king - now a captive, with the foot of a conqueror on his neck."

F.W. Robertson

ARE WE PREACHING CHRIST?

"The grand point is this, are we preaching Christ? When the crucified and glorified Christ is preached there is a blessing. It is always the experience of ministers of the Word wherever Christ is preached. This should be done with the greatest simplicity.... Christ as the Saviour is to be preached, and whether it is liked or not, we are to be faithful to our Master."

George Muller

TWO CONDITIONS

"It follows that in our service here below we may anticipate the joys of the heavenly service; but if Heaven is to be begun in our experience now, two conditions must be fulfilled, - in the outer sphere of service the toiling slave must be faithful, and in the inner sphere, - his own spirit, - the ministering priest must continually offer the sacrifice of praise and prayer. On the simultaneous fulfilment of these two conditions our "blessedness" in the service of Christ will always depend.

"Happy we live, when God doth fill
Our hands with work, our hearts with zeal,
For every toil, if He enjoin,
Becomes a sacrifice divine,
And like the blessed spirits above
The more we serve, the more we love".

J. G. Tasker

CHRIST IS ALIVE

"It is not my primary intention to state the reasons why those who do not believe in Christ should believe in Him, but to explain why it is that those who believe in Him continue to believe. This explanation however ought to show that those are in error who suppose that present controversies on the authority of the Holy Scriptures make a firm and settled faith in Christ impossible. The substance of my first answer to the question why it is that those who believe in Christ continue to believe, may be given in a single sentence: Whatever may have been the original grounds of their faith, their faith has been verified in their own personal experience. They have trusted in Christ for certain great and wonderful things, and they have received great and wonderful things. They have not perhaps received precisely what they expected when their Christian life began, for the kingdom of heaven cannot be really known until a man has entered into it; but what they have received assures them that Christ is alive, that He is within

reach, and that He is the Saviour and Lord of men. That they have received these blessings in answer to their faith in Christ is a matter of personal consciousness. They know it, as they know that fire burns.”

R. W. Dale

I HAVE LEARNED TO LISTEN

“What a loud voice Nature has to those who have ears to hear, yet withal how sweet and forceful! They tell us that if our faculties were less dull we should hear in every stem and twig and blade of grass the throbbing of the engines and the whirr and clatter of the looms which go on day and night unceasingly. It is well for us that we are not so highly tuned, but it is also well if our spiritual perceptions are keen enough to find tongues in trees and sermons in stones, and to interpret their language. I am but a dunce as yet, but I have learned one thing since I came to this northern school - I have learned to listen, and I am beginning to understand something of what God has to teach us by the mouth of his dumb prophets. Anyhow, I went home with peace in my heart and goodwill to all men; also with a mighty hunger.”

W. Riley

HOW HE BEAT THE INFIDEL

“An atheist sent a young man a parcel of infidel literature, advising him to read it in preference to the Bible. His reply could not be excelled. He wrote: - “Dear Sir, - If you have anything better than the Sermon on the Mount, the parable of the Prodigal Son, and that of the Good Samaritan, or if you have any code of morals better than the Ten Commandments, or anything more consoling and beautiful than the twenty-third Psalm, or, on the whole, anything that will throw more light on the future and reveal to me a Father more merciful and kind than the New Testament, send it along.”

T.W.T.

SELECTED BY LEONARD MORGAN

SHARE THE GOSPEL WITH YOUR MUSLIM FRIENDS

“This Jesus was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing Him to the Cross. But God raised Him from the dead, freeing Him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on Him”. Acts 2:23-24 (the Bible; NEV)

“And because of their saying: we slew the Messiah Jesus son of Mary, Allah’s messenger - they slew him not nor crucified, but it appeared so unto them; and lo! those who disagree concerning it are in doubt thereof save pursuit of a conjecture; they slew him not for certain. But Allah took him up unto Himself. Allah was ever mighty, wise”. Surah 4:157-158 (the Qur’an)

What a contrast! Islam has passed one thousand and four hundred years but still many of its adherents stumble over these two verses of the Qur’an against the Bible. Their usual way of explaining the Qaranic verses is that God concealed Jesus from His enemies, and they crucified another by mistake who resembled Jesus, and thus the Jews erroneously believed that they had crucified Jesus. There are other Muslims who say that He was crucified but did not actually die on the cross. Some believe that Jesus subsequently died a natural death in his old

age. One way or another these theories claim that Jesus did not die on the cross. Their mistaken sense of loyalty for Jesus reminds us of the immediate reaction of Peter when told by Jesus about the crucifixion (Matthew 16:22).

Many Muslims do not understand why the Christians believe in the crucified Jesus and like Peter they need time to understand. The main reason for them not understanding is that Islam rarely talks about sin and salvation in the Biblical manner. The Muslims seek their salvation, like the Jews, through righteous and pious work and rituals.

The Jew may take for granted that through his works and rituals he will be saved, but the Muslim is very confused. On the one hand, Allah sends his prophets into this world that people might be saved. On the other hand, he claims that he already has created some for the eternal fire and some for Paradise. The amulet of fate is hanging around his neck and he is not sure whether he will be saved or not.

It is interesting to know that the Qur'an says that when Adam and Eve were sent out from the Garden of Eden, God told them about a 'Guidance' who would lead them to restoration (Surah 2:38). The Qur'an also says that God ransomed Abraham with a Great Sacrifice (Surah 37:107), but is silent as to whom this Great Sacrifice was.

According to the Bible, Jesus is the Great Sacrifice (see John 1:29), and He is man's only guidance (John 14:6). The majority of Muslims till this day are not aware of these facts and of the few that are, most are hesitant like Nicodemus.

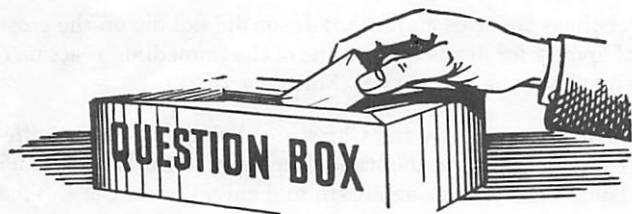
The Muslims, like the Jews in the time of Jesus and His apostles, are very zealous for God, and Paul's words, "their zeal is not based on knowledge" are equally true about them also. In Paul's words, "Since they disregarded the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness" (Rom 10:2-3; NIV).

Today there are some who have obeyed and have accepted the Righteousness that comes from the Lord almighty, but our Lord is waiting so that every one might be saved (II Peter 3:9).

When Jesus gave the Great Commission to preach the Good News to all the nations, he also meant the Muslims. He also said, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching" (John 14:10). If we love Him then there is opportunity to take the message to those of our neighbour's who don't know why Christians believe in Christ's death, His resurrection and His next Coming to judge the world. Muslims are everywhere. Therefore the question is not whether we have Muslim neighbours, but are we willing to take the message to them?

Here in Britain there are more than a million Muslims on our front door steps. Let us take this God given opportunity to share the Gospel of Christ with them. We can enjoy much greater freedom for this here in the United Kingdom than those who preach in Muslim countries where they are under many restrictions. In the cause of Jesus let us put our selves into action and help the Muslims in this country that they may know the Truth, the eternal way of Salvation. Please write to me if you need help in making Jesus known.

Steven Masood, C/o Ashurst, 60 Kenwood Road, Stretford, MANCHESTER



Conducted by
Alf Marsden

"What authority do Elders have in the Church of Christ?"

I have just recently received this question and I suppose it may have been prompted by a report in one of our national newspapers concerning the activities of a group of Elders in a Church in the Mid-West of America, the so-called Bible belt. It would be remiss of me to comment on *that* particular incident, especially while legal action is pending, but we *can* look at some of the general principles which govern the actions of those who hold this important office of Elder in the Church of Christ. In order to do this, we shall need to develop the argument from first principles.

Delegation

Delegation means giving to someone else that part of a task which one would normally do *oneself*. Every Christian is a child of God, therefore, God exercises *overall* parental control. It was God who called into *being* the Church by the preaching of the Gospel of redeeming love through Christ Jesus His Son; the *well-being* of His children He entrusts to others by delegation through His Word. Elders fall into this category. This being so, we can see at once that the office of Elder is a very important office indeed. By the very nature of the office, the Elder is 'standing in' for God in dealing with His children here on earth; the realisation of this fact pre-supposes that the Elder must *always* try to do the things which are consistent with God's Will. This is not an easy task, and for reasons which we shall comment on later this important principle becomes lost somewhere along the way.

When we consider delegation we must also consider the three other things which are inextricably bound with it, namely, responsibility, authority, and accountability. If the study is to be meaningful then we dare not divorce authority from responsibility and accountability. So let us examine them in some detail.

Responsibility

We can start by asking ourselves the question, "What does an Elder *need* to be able to take the burden of responsibility?" Having said that, it should be plain to everyone that before we can answer *that* question adequately we must first enquire as to what the Elder has to *do*. We have said that the Elder is 'standing in' for God with regard to the care of His children, so He ought to have made clear in His Word what He expects the Elder to do; so it is to the Bible that we must turn in order to find the answer.

The first thing we have to consider is a specific charge by God to the Elders. In Acts 20:38 we read "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Spirit hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with His own blood". So God's first instruction to the Elder is that he must take heed unto *himself*, before he even dare think about taking care of others. The Elder should have a consuming desire to serve his Lord in this work; the office should never, never be used as a means to an end, no

matter how laudable that end may appear to be. Let the Elder carefully examine his motives, and if these are not of the highest, then he had better not enter this work, or if he is already doing it then he would do well to resign.

Further to this Peter says, "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind" (1 Peter 5:2). Of the charges given to Elders by God, this ranks among the highest. They are required by God to meet the most demanding obligation known to man - to watch over and feed the flock, and to maintain the purity of those sacred things which God has instituted for the salvation of man. The spiritual food is just as necessary for spiritual growth as the natural food is for physical growth of the body; that is why God instructed that an Elder must be 'apt to teach'.

The Elder is to 'take the oversight'; it is his job to direct and supervise, but to do it in such a way so as not to offend God or the flock, as Peter puts it, "Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock" (1 Peter 5:3). Remember, brother Elder, it is God's heritage not yours. If it is thought that the task is great, then examine the rewards, "And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away" (1 Peter 5:4). By God's specific instruction, it is the Elders who take the oversight; no located preacher or anyone else has the God-given right to perform this task.

The Elder is to rule well. In Paul's salutation to the saints at Philippi he includes the bishops and deacons; he then goes on to say, "And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ; being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God" (Phil. 1:9-11). In ruling (and I prefer the word leading) well, the Elder must always be looking for spiritual growth in himself; the retardation of self must inevitably lead to retardation of the flock.

When we review these instructions which God has given, we are led to the conclusion that a loving God would not impose so great a responsibility to be discharged. So this is the next consideration.

Authority

In the newspaper article I mentioned earlier, the writer there talks about "the extraordinary power - and its abuses - wielded by religious zealots". What many people misunderstand, Elders included, is the difference between power and authority. An Elder who is appointed after God's pattern has no power. He has only responsibility. What God gives him is the authority to discharge his responsibility; but not one whit more. I have sometimes heard people in the Church say, "It is the prerogative of the Elders to do such and such a thing". But responsibilities are not based on prerogatives; it is in the divine rank to issue prerogatives; it is the duty of lesser rank to follow the divine prerogative. The duty of the Elder is functional, and whatever authority there is can only be claimed so long as the Elder is performing to God's pattern laid down for him. How sad it is when we see men in the Church of God, who have been unable to make a mark in any other sphere of activity, trying to wield power and lord it over God's heritage. This can only bring the Church into disrepute.

Rather paradoxically, God works the authority He gives to the Elders through the responses which the flock "make to the Elder's leadership. Let us examine these responses.

Obey the Elders. In the Hebrew letter we read, "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief; for that is unprofitable for you" (Heb. 13:17). You see how wisely God rules. He never *forces* anyone to do anything, not even to be saved. He knows that *His* authority is being recognised when the heart willingly submits to Him, and He knows full well that the Elders *cannot* rule if the members will not obey them. God's method of exercising authority is the only way for the Elder, otherwise the Eldership becomes despotic and attempts to use 'the big stick' in order to *make* people bend to their will.

Submit ourselves. When anyone submits to the authority of another then he *will* obey the will of the one to whom he submits. Someone may come into a Church and begin to take initiatives on certain matters; the initiatives may be good. But if he attempts to make the Elders to submit to *him*, then he is doing wrong; and if the Church encourages such a one in the usurpation of the Elders authority then *it* is doing wrong also. *All* members of the congregation, regardless of their age, intelligence, spiritual maturity, or secular rank, *must submit to the Elders*, in order to please God.

Do not receive an accusation against an Elder. Paul wrote to Timothy, "Against an Elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses" (1 Tim. 5:19). Accusations of misconduct against Elders should not be made unless and until they can be substantiated by two or three witnesses. It may very well be that the lives of some Elders would bear investigation, but it should be done God's way, always seeking for the highest good in any situation.

The authority that the Elder has is God's authority; it is kind, loving, compassionate, benign; it is based on love, respect, and faith. The Elder himself should know when *he* needs to submit to the Higher authority, but any community of saints must always understand that decisions have to be made by those who 'stand in' for God, and that the well-being of the community may depend upon their response to the unquestioned authority of the Eldership. Without this, I believe that no community of saints can feel really secure.

Accountability

In conclusion, both community and Elders must always remember that God demands accountability. It is said that the late President Truman had a small plaque on his desk which read, "The buck stops here". The office of Elder is no sinecure. He cannot unload his responsibility onto other shoulders; he will be called upon to give account of the souls in his charge. But it is a rewarding work. Well might Paul say to Timothy, "If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work." I suppose that the great joy of a parent is to see the child grow into physical maturity; in the same way there is great joy in seeing God's children develop into spiritual maturity. But at the end of it all, the Elder must be able to say, "To God be the glory". *His* satisfaction will come from the knowledge that as an instrument of God's use, he has been honed to perfection by the Great Instrument Maker. To be an extended arm of God is honour indeed.

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

SCRIPTURE READINGS

MAY 1984

6—Psalm 1	James 1
13—Genesis 22:1-10	James 2
20—1 Kings 3:1-15	James 3
27—Isaiah 57	James 4

THE BEHAVIOUR LETTER

THERE is discussion as to which JAMES wrote this letter. We assume it was "the Lord's brother" (Acts 21:18; Gal. 1:19) without insisting. The contents are vital, challenging, forceful and good for every day. We are immediately shaken out of any complacency. There is a natural human tendency to avoid trouble. We suggest his readers at first were christians of Jewish origin with a talent for prosperity and respectability. Things our present "western" life hold in high esteem, but dangerous to spiritual maturity. So christians must welcome trials because enduring them with patience develops real trust in God. The most precious metal is cleansed from impurity by fire. Faith, a most precious possession, is similarly purified from weakness or indifference by bearing trouble. The exercise strengthens us by driving us back upon God. It makes us long for wisdom from God, and experience proves that it is available from Him. We must look into the letter for words about the right wisdom, and its result both positive and negative upon behaviour. (3:13-18). Is not this the character of James's teaching? Our practice MUST match our profession. The attitude to our material position is gratitude for poverty equally with riches, looking to the ultimate, not the passing circumstances. It does appear that the stern warnings were needed, as also today and all through history (5:1-6). What value has the world and its

pleasures to compare with an eternity of joy in the Saviour's presence? Hell is the ultimate alternative. Jesus has said it (Matt. 6:19-21). An Old Testament saint asked for neither riches nor poverty (Prov. 30:8 & 9). Godliness with contentment is great gain (1 Tim. 6:6)! If we have riches what an opportunity to give to those in need - a plain duty and a great privilege. They are however a temptation to our worldly desires, pride and self-satisfaction. On the other hand poverty can develop jealousy and covetousness for the property of others.

THE NEW BIRTH AND LIFE

The incorruptible WORD of God is the seed which produces in us the new life in Christ (1:18). This is God's method for Himself coming into us with the final effect of eternal life - the crown of life (1:12). Hence when we are tried, we grow in likeness to Him. When He permits trial, it brings opportunity for spiritual growth. "The old man" (Col. 3:9) would bring us into the old bondage. God wills to bring us closer to Himself. We are liable to fall. God never changes and is the author of all good (1:17). So a Christian becomes a firstfruit of His harvest - the harvest of redeemed, purified souls. We then develop the hearing ear for His word and exercise avoidance of bad temper and its expression in the way we talk. Superfluity means "excess" - and naughtiness "malice" and thus we are bidden to maintain purity of speech from unclean and unkind expressions. What a high ideal we Christians have before us! The word to which we listen must be taken to heart, not heard and forgotten like what we see in the mirror.

FAITH AND WORKS

This letter has been specially noted for its insistence upon ACTING in accordance with faith (belief, conviction, confidence), and the lesson meets us in the question of "respect of

persons", meaning favourites based upon appearance or status. This is equally a matter of true relationship with God, that is "religion" (1:26). "Work" must be done in relation to those in need, and in avoidance or worldliness. Worship to God must issue in thoughtfulness for others. It is not a matter of form but of life based upon character. The idea of satisfying God's justice by acts of penitence is as wrong as thinking of forgiveness without a change in behaviour. The Christian's attendance at the Lord's Table is an essential PART only of mind and heart obedience. Neither can satisfy God's justice but faithful attendance to both brings promise of forgiveness through the sacrifice of the Lamb of God. "Without faith it is impossible to please God" (Heb. 11:6) and some to whom James writes, perhaps some of us, brethren and sisters, are relying too much on our profession, and not giving enough attention to its practice. Looking over our past as individuals can we be satisfied with ourselves? How many times has our tongue run away in saying something we wish we had kept back, or how many opportunities have we missed saying something for Jesus, or confessing Him either publicly or in private conversation. James has instruction about our use of that important means of blessing or curse (3:1-2). How strict a watch we need to keep is in view on the question of oaths (5:12) as "above all things". Expletives are OUT! We observe Jesus mentions this (Matt. 5:37). This letter breathes the "sermon on the mount". Faith is a supreme need in the Christian's life and James makes this perfectly clear. It is essential if our prayers are to be answered (1:6) and patience is impossible without it (5:7-20). The letter begins with instruction for the testing of faith, its purification, is full of instruction for putting it into use in every part of life and concludes with its exercise in prayer and conversion from

error as well as both spiritual and physical healing.

DISASTER IN THE CHURCH

We see that James sees evil in the church for there is strife there. Members are quarreling (4:1-9). With the thought that hatred is murder, he sees criminals in it. We can hardly conceive of this evil being widespread but must remember how seriously the Jews did quarrel among themselves in those early days of the revolutionary Christian society and the latest days of a decadent Jewish society, the fiercest sectarian wars. The evils which are so harshly rebuked. James faces critical attitudes of mind, speaking evil against one another (4:11), favouring the rich and despising the poor, giving too much time to worldly concerns (4:13), injustice in paying workers (5:1-6). What is the cure for such behaviour? It must be sincerely repented of. "Be afflicted and mourn and weep" (4:9; Matt. 5:4; Luke 6:20 & 21). The remedy for such troubles are supplied. Meekness of wisdom, the right wisdom, great humility are required to produce the fruits so beautifully recorded "first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated" (3:17). Adultery is unfaithfulness (4:4) and jealousy is justified on the part of the spirit dwelling in God's people against unfaithfulness, but He giveth more grace upon repentance. Love for the world estranges us from God, and the deepest humility only can restore. "He shall lift you up" (4:10).

FAITH-FULL PRAYER

We know that there is no limit to what God can heal, but we know that death is His appointment, and therefore there is a limit to what He chooses to heal. The promise is not absolute — "If we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us" (1 John 5:14) whether the answer is "Yes" or "No". Shall we humbly always ask "If it be Thy will!"

R. B. SCOTT

BELIEF : (20)**Remission of sins**

IN spite of the clarity of the Scriptures on this point, people of honest heart are sometimes confused when they hear from men opposing opinions on the efficacy of a "water salvation" (as some call it), referring to immersion in water for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). And this in spite of the fact that this is the clear teaching of the Lord himself.

Blood or Water?

It would be easy to scorn such objections, but since they are honestly held by some we must meet them honestly, by reference to the Word of truth. In this way we hope to ensure that God's truth will prevail and not the opinions of men.

No Contradiction

The main ground of objection usually, is that we are saved by Christ's blood and NOT by water. Yet Peter says that we are saved by both! (See 1 Peter 1:18-19 and 3:21). Paul reveals the same two aspects of salvation in Romans 6:3-5 and Colossians 1:14. But, most important of all, our Lord and Saviour himself says so! He said: "This is my blood which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matthew 26:28). He also says: "He that believeth and is immersed shall be saved" (Mark 16:16). Again, "... that repentance and remission of sins be preached in his name among all nations ..." (Luke 24:47). Salvation by means of his blood and by immersion cannot be contradictory and the only possible solution is that they must be complementary—i.e., they must both operate in the salvation of those who sincerely believe that Jesus is the Son of God. Let us study both aspects and see what the Scriptures say about them.

The Shedding of Blood

"Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isaiah 1:18). So says God

himself in reference to the cleansing of the guilty conscience. Hebrews 9:22 relates this to the shedding of blood: "Without the shedding of blood is no remission."

Questions

If, to satisfy the demands of divine justice sins are to be remitted by blood shedding, how is this done? Why is blood necessary? It seems to the writer that these are the kinds of questions which must arise in dealing with such a problem. Can they be answered?

"The Life is in the Blood"

So spoke God, the Creator of all life (Leviticus 17:11). Consequently the Lord forbade the eating of blood, not only to Jews, but also to Christians (Acts 15:20).

The shedding of animal blood was enjoined upon the priests in their temple worship. Only *clean* animals were to be used for this purpose and the blood was to be sprinkled upon the altar within the Holy of Holies.

This was done to expiate the sins of the people and was performed by the High Priest once a year on the Day of Atonement. Thus were God's ancient people cleansed of their defilement.

This had to be done every year, not only for the sins of the people, but also for the High Priests's sins. This is explained in the book of Leviticus (Laws) under the Old Testament covenant between God and the Jews.

Why?

Why this is so is not explained by God in his Word, nor has it been deemed necessary by him to reveal why such shedding of blood should be essential. Possibly this is because there is no medium or words available whereby man could understand what, after all, strikes at the very meaning and origin of life.

Obedience of Belief

Neither could God's people of old understand, but this did not prevent

them obeying God's instructions to the letter. Even they appreciated what many today find it hard to appreciate: the importance of the obedience of (consequent upon) belief (Hebrews 11).

Exercises in Belief

Leviticus 1:1-3, 10; 16:15-16; 17:10-11; 23:12; 26:23-24, 40-46; Acts 15:20; Ephesians 1:7; 2:13; Colossians 1:14; Hebrews 9:12; 1 Peter 1:18-22.

W. BROWN

(To Be Continued)

NEWS FROM THE CHURCHES

Cape Town, R.S.A.: "The work where I am labouring with the small congregation Bokmakierie, Athlone area is going along very well, attendance-wise, not only by members but visitors who express deep and sincere interest in the word of God, Some attend weekly cottage meetings and Bible Study as well. And since as I have always mentioned in my contact with you (news-wise) that we are hopefully and prayerfully, looking forward to precious souls turning to the Lord in obedience to the gospel.

Well to an extent this became one of a reality, when after our Bible study Thursday 9th February '84 the grandson of the sister in whose home we have our weekly meetings (she is his grandmother) he asked to be baptized, and along with members and a few visitors we went along to baptize him. Then the husband whose wife I baptized last July, who has been attending our services and weekly meetings, requested to be baptized last Sunday the 12th February '84.

We can say what great moments it has been for this man to have now joined hands with his wife, going forward on the road to Eternity, and for that grandson, joining hands with his mother, grandmother and sister on the same road, not alone did we rejoice,

"but with the Angels of God in Heaven". And we are praying that their example in so doing shall motivate others Lord willing. To the Glory of God, "a good start for 1984".

And in closing, pray that the joys and "innumerable blessings" we have enjoyed and shared during 1983, might be among all of us who share and serve the Lord, be ours together to share Lord willing during 1984".

T.W. HARTLE

Slamannan District, Scotland: The Quarterly Mutual Benefit Meeting took Place at the Tranent Meeting house on March 3rd with a goodly attendance. The Chairman was James Sinclair (Sen) and the speakers Harry McGinn, Dalmellington, and Hugh Davidson, Motherwell. The Subject was 'To a Christian what is the definition of Life and of Death'. The speakers (in their allotted time of 15 minutes) dealt ably with their task and in the general discussion period thereafter many interesting comments, and questions, were raised from the body of the hall. The current questions of abortion and 'sparepart surgery' come within the scope of this subject but unfortunately lack of time prevented a development of these two aspects. A very enjoyable time of fellowship was enjoyed by all. The next meeting, God willing, will be at Haddington, on 12th May, at 4 p.m. when the subject will be "What strategy should be adopted to evangelise the world." The chairman will be James R. Gardiner, the speakers will be John Colgan, Tranent, and John McLuckie, Haddington.

The Tranent meeting represented the twentieth anniversary of the inauguration of these meetings: no less than 80 subjects have been dealt with during that time. Brother Ian Davidson distributed to all present at the Tranent meeting a copy of all the subjects dealt with.

H. Davidson, Sec.

OBITUARY

MARY SCOTT - Known in many parts of the world as "the hostess" at 96 Chetwynd Road, Kentish Town, and later at 20 Midhurst Avenue, Muswell Hill, passed to her rest on Thursday, February 9th, after sustaining a broken femur, and being cared for at Pembury Hospital, Tunbridge Wells, the town where she has been blessed with the loving care of Derek and Margaret Daniell and family for three years. Her passing was peaceful and every possible care was taken by the hospital staff. We record her passing with the mixed feelings of those who have for long appreciated a life given to the worship and service of a Saviour Who cares for His people. She was 81 years old, had reared four children who love her, feel their loss, but rejoice in the consolation. She leaves thirteen grandchildren, some of whom are already following in the WAY. The funeral service was conducted at Hope Chapel and at the graveside by Brother Derek Daniell. Floral tributes were shared with the hospital staff in recognition of their service, and money donated sent to the support of Reg and Ruth Coles for their work in Papua New Guinea. Many members, relatives and friends were present. The family join Brother Scott in expressing thanks for letters and cards of loving sympathy. Special thanks are due to the church at Tunbridge Wells.

Burns Street, Ilkeston: On the 24th February, 1984, the Lord called to rest his faithful servant, brother M. Bradley, aged 78 years. He served his Lord over forty years in this corner of his vineyard with a steadfast faith. May he hear those reassuring words "Well done thou good and faithful servant."

Brother T. Woodhouse officiated at the church service and at the

Crematorium. We tender our deepest sympathy to his family in their sad loss.
W. Wheatley, Sec.

Hindley: It came as a shock to receive news on Lord's Day 28th February, that Sister Hannah Barstowe had passed away, for she was at the meeting the previous week and said she was feeling much better.

Although suffering from a serious complaint she was present when able to do so, not only at our meetings but also at district events.

May the God of all consolation support her sorrowing loved ones.

Tom Kemp

Hindley: It is with saddened hearts that we report the passing to a higher life of Brother Billy Jones on Saturday March 10th, the funeral service taking place in the Argyle St., meeting house, on Wednesday the 14th, conducted by Br. L. Morgan.

It is over ten long years since our brother was able to meet with us, long weary years, spent in and out of hospital, and confinement in the home. Distressing also because of the continued illness of his dear wife Jenny, who is also undergoing similar confinement, through loss of a limb, and now further infection in her other leg.

At last the release from all this has come in his 84th year, and he leaves behind him many treasured memories of fellowship and service.

Many brethren have cause to remember Billy and Jenny for times of accomodation given so often and so willingly during the years of the Hindley Bible School.

We bear our beloved sister Jenny and her loved ones in prayer to God knowing that He alone is the source of all comfort and is able to support and strengthen them to bear with courage this time of distress and trial.

Tom Kemp

COMING EVENTS

BUCKIE SOCIAL

In the Meetinghouse at Buckie, on
Saturday 2nd June, 1984 (D.V.)
at 3 p.m.

Speaker: Graham Gorton
Chairman: William Strachan
All Welcome

BEFORE OUR TIME

"For whatsoever was written aforetime
was written for our learning; that we,
through patience, and comfort of the
scriptures, might have hope." Romans
15:4.

If tempted read Psalm 19

If depressed read Psalm 27

If poor read Psalm 37

If discouraged read Psalm 128

If people seem unkind read John 15

If losing confidence read 1 Cor. 13

If you cannot get your own way
read James 3

If out of sorts read Hebrews 12
T KEMP

THREE MONKEYS

THREE monkeys sat in a coconut tree,
Discussing things as they're said to be.
Said one to the others, "Now listen, you
two;

There's a certain rumour, but it can't
be true,

That man descended from our noble
race;

The very idea's a mocking disgrace.

There never was a monk who deserted
his wife,

Starved her babes and ruined her life;
And you've never known a mother
monk

To leave her babes with others, to
bunk,

Or pass them on, from one to another,
Till they scarcely know who is their
mother.

And another thing: you'll never see
A monk build a fence round a coconut
tree

And let the coconuts go to waste,
Forbidding all other monks a taste.
Should I put a fence around a tree
Starvation would force you to steal
from me.

Here's another thing a monk won't do,
Go out at night, and get on a stew;
Or use a gun, or club, or knife
To take some other monkey's life.
Oh yes! Man descended, with all his
fuss,

But brothers, he didn't descend from
us."

—Selected, with acknowledgement to
Bro. James Grant, Wallacestone.

THE SCRIPTURE STANDARD is published monthly.

PRICES PER YEAR - POST PAID BY SURFACE MAIL

UNITED KINGDOM and COMMONWEALTH.....£5.50

CANADA & U.S.A.\$10.00

AIR MAIL please add £1.50 or \$3.00 to above surface mail rates

DISTRIBUTION AGENT & TREASURER:

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Telephone: Longniddry (0875) 53212 to whom change of address should be sent.

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Scotland EH37 5PT. Telephone: Ford 320 527

"The Scripture Standard" is printed for the publishers by Walter Barker (Printers) Ltd.,
Langley Mill, Nottm. Tel. Langley Mill (0773) 712266