

The SCRIPTURE STANDARD

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

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Why Not?

SOME thirty years ago, a brother teaching the men's Bible class of which I was a member told of an experience he had with a friend from one of the religious denominations. This man had expressed himself as puzzled that in the churches of Christ we did not do so many things that are looked upon as a necessary part of the church's work and worship. "Well," said the brother, "we are a peculiar people."

Although, no doubt, he knew quite well what the word "peculiar" meant in this passage (1 Peter 2 : 9), perhaps to his friend it expressed exactly the ideas he had concerning us; peculiar in the sense of being singular, strange, odd. It is one of those words used so often in a wrong or subsidiary sense that that meaning has come to be regarded as its only meaning. Thus, when any of us speaks of a thing or person as "peculiar" we usually mean that it or he is odd, strange.

Looking into the dictionary, however, we find much enlightenment. Indeed, from the Shorter Oxford Dictionary, one of the finest in the world, we are astonished to learn that this commonly accepted meaning is given as only the fourth and last of the meanings of the word "peculiar": "singular, strange, odd, queer." The first, correct and original meaning of the word is defined as "That is one's own private property; that belongs exclusively to an individual person. . ."

It is exactly in this first sense that Peter uses the word: "But ye are a . . . peculiar people." In Ellicott's Commentary this is explained as follows: "This curious phrase is literally, a people for a special reservation. The word rendered "peculiar" . . . would be represented in Latin by the word *peculium*, which means a man's private pocket-money, as, for instance, the money a slave could make by working over hours, or such as a wife might have apart from her husband. When children speak of things as being their "very own" it exactly expresses what we have here. So in Acts 20 : 28 . . . both the hard earning and the special possession are intended: "the church of God, which he won so hard for his very own, by his own blood." Comp. 1 Thess.V. 9 & Eph.1.7, where it means 'for a redemption which consists of taking possession of us for his own sake'."

In singing Isaac Watt's great hymn, "Jesus shall reign," have we ever thought what is meant by the words in the last verse, "Let every creature rise and bring Peculiar honours to our King"? Watts meant, not strange, outlandish offerings to Christ, but the honours due from the loving hearts of those whom He has bought and saved with His own blood; His own people; His own possession. Watts gives the true and scriptural meaning to the word here.

"Why do you not . . . ?"

We are often asked this question by our religious friends. We may have been trying to explain to them characteristics of churches of Christ, or they may have attended our meetings and cannot understand why, for instance, we do not repeat the "Lord's Prayer," do not use organs to accompany the singing, do not take collections except from "our own members", do not have "ministers" (in the popularly accepted sense of the term), do not "baptise" babies, and welcome only immersed believers to fellowship at the Lord's table.

In a sense, these "why not's"? are a compliment. We are not asked "why" we do or teach certain things; can we take it, then, that there is no question about these things being right? Their objections or puzzlement are about what we do not do. If we were to ask our friends "What in our worship or teaching or practices do you think is wrong or unauthorised"? they thus admit that they have no such objections. But "Why do you not..."? They do not ask us to put certain things out but to introduce other things. In the meeting in 1943 of the representatives of the Co-operation of Churches of Christ and brethren in the "Old Paths" movement a brother asked the Co-operation brethren, "What in our teaching or practices do you raise objection to"?, in other words, "What have we to relinquish before you can be one with us"? There was no reply.

Strictly speaking, we are not called upon to show "why not," to prove a negative. It is the positive, the assertion, that must be proved. We need not prove why we do not do certain things accepted as a necessary part of church work, worship and organisation. It is for those who practise such things to show why they do. But for two reasons we are ready to go farther than we are called upon: 1st, to explain to non-members of the church of Christ, so that they will have clearer understanding and will not look upon us as deliberately contrary, or conceited, or self-righteous; and 2nd, to teach especially the young in the churches, to help them to "give a reason" for what we do and what we do not. We must remember that, while older brethren have had experience in the churches of some of the things we do not now practise, and have now put them away, the younger have had no such experience: they can consequently take our present order for granted, without troubling to ask themselves why we are different in these respects from the religious denominations around us. We want all in the churches, young and old, to be able, with courtesy and humility, to give reasons for our beliefs. So many things are looked upon as essential to constitute and carry on a church which, when we "search the scriptures," have no part there.

It is our intention, therefore, by God's will, to devote a short series of articles, under the general heading "Why Not...?" to such topics as those mentioned earlier in this article.

We must measure by a standard

To carry out this intention it is necessary first to agree absolutely upon a standard, a rule, a final arbiter. This standard must be the word of God, the scriptures. We cannot agree to any other, for no other is authoritative. So soon as a church or a person begins to object to the scriptures as the standard, the guide, we can be sure that they are afraid of examining themselves, their teaching and their practices in the light of God's truth, and can therefore not claim to be a church of Christ or followers of Christ. To fail to agree that the scriptures are the only source for all that God requires of His church is to end up in chaos, every man a law to himself, "doing what is right in his own eyes." That way lies spiritual anarchy. If the Bible is not to be the standard, what is? There can be no agreement where two or more different standards are accepted.

So we shall take in these studies, the Bible and the Bible alone as our authority — the Old Testament insofar as its teaching is brought over into the New, and the New Testament as being God's guidance for His people in this gospel, Christian age, and which completely equips them to carry out all God's purposes for His church.

God willing, then, we shall deal next month with the subject of
INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC IN THE CHURCH.

EDITOR.

The Relation of Baptism to Fellowship

MY theme concerns the relationship of baptism to fellowship. This requires, at the outset, a definition of the two major terms. By fellowship I mean simply that state or condition in which we have a joint participation with God, Christ, and the saints through the Spirit, and into which we are called by the Father (1 Cor. 1:9). As respects our relationship with God our fellowship is based upon sonship; as respects the other heirs it is a brotherhood resulting from a common Fatherhood. The fellowship in Christ Jesus includes every person on earth in whom the Holy Spirit dwells and is therefore designated the fellowship of the Spirit.

Baptism, as defined for this thesis, is the immersion in water of a believing penitent, in obedience to the will of our Lord Jesus Christ. What relationship does

this act have to admission into the fellowship of the saved ones? To offset any doubt and to make it easier for you to follow my presentation, let me inform you now that it is my conviction that baptism is the enabling act by which a proper subject is translated, or transferred, from the domain of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son. It is the inductive act by which he enrolls in the fellowship of the saved ones. Before such an audience of informed students of the word of God one need only mention certain scriptures without giving the contextual setting. I shall briefly state some of my reasons for regarding baptism as essential unto entrance into the fellowship.

1. The fellowship embraces those who are in Christ Jesus. Whatever is requisite to bring one into Christ is essential to induction into the fellowship. "For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal. 3 : 26, 27).

2. The fellowship embraces those whose sins have been forgiven and who have entered into covenantal relationship through the indwelling Spirit. "And Peter said to them, 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit'" (Acts 2 : 38). It is not by mere chance the record continues, "So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship..."

3. The fellowship embraces those who have been brought into relationship with the Godhood. "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations baptizing into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28 : 19). Note that the original does not bear out the idea of baptism in the name of the Godhood, but into the name. Jesus is not giving a ritual to say when performing the act of baptism nor did he mean to imply that in performance of the act the apostles would be doing so by the authority of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He was telling them into what relationship they were to disciple believers of the Good News by means of baptism.

4. The church of God at Corinth, composed of those who were sanctified in Christ Jesus, that is who were saints by calling, was made up of those who were distinctly said to have been "called into the fellowship." They were temporarily divided over men and for this reason the apostle proposed certain questions. Not one of these, however, related to whether they had been baptized. He did not say, "Were you baptized?" but "Were you baptized in the name of Paul"? Indeed, he affirms that all were baptized, and by this act brought into the one body. "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body — Jews or Greeks, slaves or free — and all were made to drink of one Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:13).

I think the scholarship of the world will agree that within the period of apostolic labour and teaching every congregation of saints on earth was composed only of baptized believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no record in the apostolic memoirs of any person being recognised or regarded as being in the community of the saved ones who had not been baptized into Christ. All such ideas are post-apostolic and, therefore, without scriptural warrant. While they may appeal to those who would construct a religious economy based on human wisdom and philosophy they can have no place in the thinking of those who are wholly committed to a restoration of the primitive order and who should have as their starting-point a recognition of the Christian scriptures as "the only rule and measure of Christian faith and learning."

Our responsibility is not to reveal to God what we would believe, but to believe what God has revealed unto us. We should seek to recover what he has uncovered in His word and abide therein regardless of cost. Our task is not to draw lines, but it is to discover where God has drawn them, and remain within them while urging others to do likewise, not out of respect for our views but out of reverence for His authority.

I have repeatedly said that I will make nothing a test of fellowship which God has not made a condition of salvation. Unthinking and casual critics have assailed this in an attempt to find some inconsistency. These critics have been of two sorts. One is made up of those who would remove the limitations God has set; the other of those who would set limitations God has not placed. The first would receive those whom God does not and the second would debar many of those whom God has received. To be quite frank and candid, I do not regard as being in the one body those who have not been baptized for the simple reason that this is a condition of entrance established by God.

I hold that entrance into the fellowship of the saints is conditioned upon belief of one fact and obedience to one act in validation of that fact. That fact is the only foundation of Christian union and communion. It is the only creed to which one must subscribe to fulfill the requirements as to the faith essential to justification. No man has the right to ask another to confess any less, no one has

the authority to ask another to confess any more. That is that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. The one act is baptism on the basis of, and prompted by, that faith.

The reason I regard baptism as a test of fellowship is because God has made it a condition of salvation. Jesus said, in commissioning the apostles to proclaim the good news to the whole creation, "He who believes and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:16). It is not my prerogative to question why God proposed this condition. I must simply recognise it and abide by it. The fellowship is constituted of those who are saved from their sins, belief and baptism are divine conditions for such salvation, consequently I regard baptism as a test of fellowship. Those who have been baptized into Christ Jesus are in the fellowship; those who have not been baptized into Him are not in the fellowship.

You will note that I have defined baptism as immersion. This presents another problem to a great many among my brethren in this day. It is obvious that my definition is much more restricted and limited than one found in a contemporary American or English dictionary. In view of the fact that thousands of people will rely upon the dictionary to justify sprinkling, and thus conclude that they have been baptized because they have been sprinkled, the spirit of charity would prompt many of the brethren to receive such into the fellowship, or, at least regard them as having been received of God.

Again, let me make it clear that I do not doubt the sincerity nor impugn the motives of those precious souls who are sprinkled under the impression that they are being baptized. Neither do I question or censure the charitable attitude of those who would receive such upon what I regard as mistaken views. But neither sincerity nor charity can change a fact, and the meaning of any word is a question, not of opinion, but of fact, and thus it must be ascertained by examination of credible witnesses.

The English Dictionary is not a proper criterion for judging the meaning of a term used by the Holy Spirit. A dictionary only purports to give the current or contemporary significance attached to a word at a given period in its history. Thus, we cannot be governed by Webster's Dictionary and the new covenant scriptures at the same time. We must decide which one we will accept as our rule of faith and practice.

It may be urged that common usage can so alter and amend the meaning of a term as to make it extremely unlikely that the average person will even doubt or question the validity of that meaning, and such person with the deepest sincerity will take the action suggested by popular usage in full conviction that he has done all that is required. This we freely and unreservedly admit, and yet in the spiritual realm such reasoning may be of little genuine consequence. It overlooks the fact that our relationship to God is individual and personal, and that each individual is obliged to ascertain the will of God and to implement it in his life. If he is incapable of determining or understanding the will of God that is a wholly different thing.

The will of God could not be known by man until it was communicated to him and the method of communication had to be that which was familiar to man. Since the highest form of communication known to man is that which employs words as symbols of ideas or vehicles of thoughts, we must turn to the words of God if we would know the thought of God. It is affirmed that "No one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God" (1 Cor. 2:12). It is further affirmed by the same apostle that he did not receive the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, and the purpose of such reception was to enable him to understand the things communicated or bestowed by God. He then says, "And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things in spiritual language."

No man can do what God requires by doing something else. That God requires one to be baptized as a means of entrance into the one body few of us would deny. The only problem which concerns us then is as to the action required by the word "baptism." The question is not what a modern dictionary, a theological creed or an ecclesiastical compendium assigns as a meaning of baptism, but what significance was attached to it by the Holy Spirit. The apostle clearly distinguished between words as taught by human wisdom and those taught by the Spirit. It is just as essential that we maintain the distinction between what human wisdom suggests and what the Holy Spirit taught as that the distinction be made originally. Indeed, to do otherwise would place us in the position of sitting in judgment upon the apostles and prophets and declaring by caprice that what they wrote was of little consequence and could be abrogated by subsequent denominational creeds and vagaries of opinion.

If the word "baptism" when used by the Spirit indicated a certain action, and if that action was regarded as baptism, then any other action is not baptism

as defined by the Spirit. Such other action may be designated baptism by other authority and may even come to be regarded as baptism because of common usage, but it is not baptism at all when measured by the authority of God's revelation. When I speak of baptism I must mean the same thing Jesus meant when he spoke of baptism. I must mean the same thing Paul meant when he spoke of baptism. I must mean the same thing Peter meant when he spoke of baptism. If I mean something else it is not baptism at all within the scriptural context, and I have simply substituted the words which human wisdom teaches for what the Holy Spirit taught.

Baptism is a positive ordinance and not a moral precept. God commands a moral precept because it is right, but a positive ordinance is right only because God commands it. That which makes a moral precept right is inherent in it and stems from its nature, but that which makes a positive ordinance right is the will and authority of the lawgiver. For that reason no moral precept can ever be a test of faith in God, for one who conforms to such a precept may do so because of his rational conclusion as to its utility, benefit or expediency, or a combination of these. Only a positive ordinance can truly act as a criterion by which to measure the depth of faith in the lordship of Jesus, because such an ordinance will be obeyed out of respect for His lordship, that is, His sovereign right to require it.

It would seem that, because of both its nature and purpose, a positive institution must be one which is specific and which requires a properly designed and exact action performed by a qualified subject. Since God does not act capriciously nor require that of us which is incongruous with Christianity as a system, any action required to bring us into the fellowship of the saints must be compatible with what has been done by the Godhood to create and establish that fellowship. God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself and the ministry of reconciliation is based upon the announcement of three great facts, viz., that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures. This is what one must believe to be saved, and by it he will be saved if he holds it fast.

To serve as a test of faith in these facts, divine wisdom has ordained that each individual shall re-enact in his own life those acts which Jesus performed for all mankind. That which was done for all by one must be done once for all by each one. Every man must be a dramatic participant in the "passion play." So the apostle declares, "We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4). Buried with him by baptism! This is the act God requires of us all and the purpose of the requirement is obvious.

Baptism is not an act we perform but an act performed with us or for us by another. It is the task of an administrator to baptize. The subject is passive, the administrator is active. The subject sustains the same relationship to the administrator as the corpse does to the mortician. While the subject is required to be baptized it is the administrator who is commanded to baptize. "Go you and make disciples of all nations by baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." One who is dead has no functioning will of his own, he is simply a subject for burial. No administrator has ever been authorized to do anything with such a subject except to bury him. An administrator who performs any other action has not baptized one at all. He acts with no authority except the dictates of human wisdom and the one who submits to the action he imposes has not actually demonstrated faith in the authority of Jesus, duly arrived at by honest and impartial investigation into the requirement of the Sovereign. There is a great difference between faith in Christ Jesus and belief of the articles of a creed, confession or concordat. Baptism is a divine ordinance to test faith in the former and was never intended to be a test of faith in the latter. To make it so is to abuse it and abort it from its sacred purpose.

1. There is no indication that the ordinance of baptism was to be either transient or transitory. Instead, it is in conjunction with the commission to baptize believers everywhere into the name of the Godhood that Jesus specifically says, "And be assured, I am with you always, to the end of time" (Matt. 28:20). In view of the fact that baptism was a command growing out of the universal authority of Jesus, we may logically conclude that it be operative while he possesses such authority, or until he exercises his authority to rescind it as specifically as he authorised it.

2. In his dealing with man the divine creator has made our well-being and happiness dependent upon ordinances of his appointment. All blessings are dispensed in conjunction with ordinances. This is as true in the natural or physical as in the spiritual realm since the same God is author of both. It is not ours to question why this should be so. It is enough that we recognise and acknowledge it.

In neither the natural nor spiritual domain can we even substitute one divine ordinance for another, much less substitute one of our own devising for the divine. Each ordinance has its own value and virtue. In the realm of nature there is no substitute for air, light, or warmth; in the spiritual realm there can be none for faith, repentance, or baptism. One cannot substitute the Lord's Supper for faith, nor repentance for baptism, without doing despite to the institutions of grace and suffering irreparable damage to his growth in Christian character. The substitution of another "symbol" for baptism is not the sign of inward cleansing but an open demonstration of presumption.

3. No man can substitute another act for baptism by divine authority. If he quotes any passage of scripture relating to initiation into Christ Jesus he must reckon with baptism. Thus, the real problem is not whether something else is just as effectual as baptism, a thing we can never possibly decide without another revelation from Jesus who authorised baptism, but whether we will respect the authority of Jesus. If we will not accept His authority as given in his revelation, on what ground do we conclude that one would accept His authority in additional revelation?

4. It is to be seriously questioned whether baptism is a mere overt symbol of inward cleansing. It is the language of the creeds which states that it is "an outward sign of inward grace." Nowhere in the sacred scriptures it is called either a sign or symbol. Cleansing from sin is by an act of God and any sign it has been effected should be given by God to the pardoned individual. The seal given to us is the indwelling Spirit. Baptism is an act of obedience by which we announce the acceptance of the lordship of Jesus over our lives and place ourselves under His authority, thus bringing ourselves into that relationship where pardoning grace can forgive us of our sins and free us from their guilt.

Lordship creates a master-servant relationship and one can only acknowledge it by doing what the lord requires or demands. Verbal assent is not enough. "Not everyone who calls me 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only those who do the will of the heavenly Father" (Matt. 7 : 21). "Blessed is the man whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing" (Matt. 24 : 46). "Why call ye me 'Lord, Lord' and do not the things which I tell you?" (Luke 6 : 46). It is only those who are willing to allow the Lord to reign over them who are entitled to the bestowal of blessings in Christ and who can thus be received as in Christ. Baptism is a test of one's willingness to submit to the Lordship of Jesus.

5. We readily concede that it is the inner cleansing of the temple by God which is of supreme importance, but since God imposes His will upon no man and since acknowledgment of the right of Jesus to exercise sovereignty in our hearts is essential to the divine entrance into our hearts, and since such acknowledgment must be made in action and not in mere statement, is it too much to conclude that baptism is the key provided by which we open the door of our heart by faith? Is this not faith working by love to achieve the divine purpose in our lives?

The real question is not whether we have a right to make the understanding of one word a test of admission into the fellowship but whether the Lord has established an ordinance as a condition of entrance into such fellowship and if such an ordinance is positive in nature, action and design. If there is but one door constructed by the builder of the house as a means of access to the blessings within, we argue in vain when we contend about whether we have the right to make access to those blessings contingent upon discovery of such a small thing as the right key. Our complaints are not actually against those who use the key and seek to get others to do so but constitute a reflection against the wisdom of the builder.

Our view of baptism stems from a firm personal conviction that it is the will of God and that we cannot be walking in His paths while weakening His words. Our Lord still sits at the right hand of the Father and must still rule in our own lives. The word of the absent King is precious to us and we propose to proclaim it as best we can and implement it by our conduct. The love for others which does not stem from faith in Him will eventually supplant Him in our hearts with the worship of self.

W. CARL KETCHERSIDE
("Mission Messenger,"
January, 1964).

SOMETIMES we grieve the Holy Spirit by unbecoming speech, undisciplined emotions, by being thoughtless of His presence and careless of His pleasure. But we can also grieve Him by being heedless of His power. "Be filled"—seize this power, appropriate it by faith, and do not grieve God's Spirit further by refusing to avail yourselves of it.

Admission Tickets

Sir,—As a simple old man, rapidly approaching his allotted span of three score years and ten, I should be glad if someone would enlighten me on a matter which appears to be of very great importance.

A week or so ago during a Sunday evening television programme we were shown a number of nurses in a hospital receiving instructions on the correct way to baptise a young baby feared to be dying. A few days later I read in the daily paper of how a Bishop gave some special administration to a man about to be hung.

What is the significance or object of these final administrations?

Although I have not entered a church for over fifty years, I have always been greatly influenced by the teachings of Christ, and in my own way have tried to live according to them. But I should hate to arrive at the Pearly Gates to find my admittance refused on the grounds that I had not been baptised or something.

F. J. KNIGHT.

'In all things very superstitious' (Acts 19:23)

THE above is a reprint of a letter appearing in the "Guardian", January 2nd. On reading it some thoughts passed through my mind to which I give expression now, and which have been fortified by some occurrences in religious circles these past few days.

First, you will notice that the writer of the letter is puzzled by some practices of the Church of England. He refers to the "preparation," by an Anglican clergyman, of a condemned criminal for death, by receiving his confession and, presumably, absolving him then receiving him into the church through what is termed baptism. Not only the letter-writer is at a loss to understand these practices: we confess we are, too.

Notice, also, that the correspondent can see no meaning in these things, and asks for enlightenment upon them. Such enlightenment we cannot give, nor, we imagine, can the clergymen carrying on these practices. But we find no cause for dismay in this. For what he inveighs against is not Christianity, the teaching of Christ and His apostles. It is not found in the New Testament, nor in the whole Bible, except to be condemned.

This is another instance of "Churchianity," religiosity, being mistaken for Christianity. Men see these things taking place and hear such teaching advanced, and take it for granted that it is authoritative, as coming from such sources. They cannot understand, but are content to leave it to the professional religionists: they must know what they are doing. But it is looked upon as Christianity, as having its origin in the Bible. Thus the genuine is judged by the counterfeit, and, alas, the genuine is discarded as a result. If only men would "search the scriptures to see whether these things were so." Give a man a Bible and leave him without the expositions and explanations and glosses of the clerics, and he will find for himself the simple, pure way of Christ and salvation. Examine these superstitious doings in the light of the word of God and we shall find the difference to be as light to darkness, truth to error. What passes for Christianity, as set forth by religious bodies, is far removed from what the New Testament itself sets forth.

The letter-writer is puzzled about baptism; and no wonder, in view of the meaningless mumbo-jumbo which passes for baptism as taught by the clergy. Look upon the rite as commonly practised, then compare it with what was taught and done in the New Testament. There we find it full of meaning and power. The closer we study it the richer with meaning it becomes.

The superstition, even paganism, which cling to "established religion" have been shown in clearer light by the recent goings-on of the Bishop of Exeter in exorcising a ghost from a cottage in Devon. Interviewed on the radio, the Bishop was unable to give any reason why he carried out the rite, nor to claim any results as the outcome. He did it as a ritual, without belief.

And what of the cursing of the "black magic" practitioners by the Rector of Bramber, Sussex? Solemnly and in the name of God he uttered this curse, "and may the Lord have mercy on their souls". Well might the cartoonist make his drawing of the complaint of the witches that "They used to burn us for this sort of thing"!

C. MELLING.



(Conducted by
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FAITH PUT TO THE TEST

DO you remember how Abraham left his home and country and went out to another land "not knowing where he went"? Why did he do this? Because God told him to do it. What was the name of the son born to his wife Sarah? Yes, "Isaac," meaning "laughter." Now God had promised that through this child a great nation would come—the Israelites, and of course everything depended upon Isaac growing to manhood.

A Strange Command

One day Abraham received a strange command from the Lord. It was this: "Take your son, your only son, the son you love, take Isaac and go to the district of Moriah and there offer him in sacrifice on one of the hills" (Genesis 22).

Why should God ask this? Genesis 22:1 says, "God did tempt Abraham." But "tempt" may give you a wrong idea. It does not mean that God was trying to get him to do wrong. It is better put like this, "God did prove Abraham," or "God put him to the test." So it was a test of his faith, or trust in the Lord.

Abraham's Obedience

Abraham went to the land of Moriah, taking with him Isaac, two of the servants, and the wood needed for the altar fire. On the third day he looked up and saw the place at a distance. He said to the servants, "You stay here . . . the lad and I are going yonder to worship, and then we will come back to you." So on they went, Isaac carrying the wood and his father the fire and the knife. "Father," said Isaac, "here are the fire and the knife, but where is the sheep for the sacrifice?" Abraham answered, "God will provide himself with a sheep for the sacrifice, my boy."

God's Provision

When they arrived at the chosen spot, Abraham built the altar, laid the wood upon it, then bound Isaac and put him upon the wood. He then prepared to kill his son, but the angel of the Lord called out, "Abraham, Abraham!" He said, "Here I am." The angel said, "Do not lay hands on the lad, do nothing to

him; I now know that you revere God, since you have not grudged me your son, your only son." Then, looking up, Abraham saw a ram caught by its horns in a bush. So he took the ram and offered it in sacrifice to God. Then he gave a name to the place, "Jehovah-jireh," which means "God provides on the hill."

A Blessing Promised

The Lord said to Abraham, "Since you have done this . . . I will indeed bless you, I will indeed make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sand on the sea-shore . . . and through you all nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed my word." Notice why Abraham was blessed—because he obeyed the Lord.

A Lesson For Us

Of course God did not want Abraham to kill his son—but he did want him to show his faith by his deeds. And this is something you and I need to learn to do. Mind you, it isn't easy. But it's no use at all saying that we love God, then doing just as we please. If we truly love the Lord it will be our greatest joy to do whatever he asks. Jesus said, "My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me, and I give unto them eternal life. . . ." (John 10:27-28). So the sheep of the Good Shepherd are marked in the ear—they "hear his voice," and in the foot—they "follow him." Never forget this: if we really love Jesus we shall always listen carefully to what he says and gladly do all that he asks. And like Abraham we shall be greatly blessed.

A GREAT ACHIEVEMENT

HAD it been published by a voice from heaven, that twelve poor men, taken out of boats and creeks, without any help of learning, should conquer the world by the cross, it might have been thought an illusion against all the reason of men; yet we know it was undertaken and accomplished by them. They published this doctrine in Jerusalem, and quickly spread it over the greatest part of the world. Folly outwitted wisdom and weakness overpowered strength. The conquest of the East by Alexander was not so admirable as the enterprise of these poor men.—Charnock.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

MARCH, 1964

1—Genesis 22:1-19	Mark 5:21-43
8—Genesis 24:1-31	Mark 6:1-29
15—Genesis 24:32-67	Mark 6:30-56
22—Genesis 37	Mark 7:1-30
29—Genesis 39	Mark 7:31 to 8:21

HARDNESS OF HEART

ONLY once in the gospels is anger attributed to Jesus though we might consider His denunciation of the hypocritical Pharisees indicated such a feeling in His loving heart, and also His action in "cleansing" the Temple courts. The scourge of small cords was used for sheep and oxen (John 2:15 R.V.) but He overturned the tables too. However the record we refer to is in Mark's gospel, and we recently read it (3:5). Anger and grief filled His heart for the wickedness of the plan to tempt Him to do something thought to be against the law (wrongly of course as in so many cases of a similar kind), and the indifference to human suffering thus exhibited. And the grief has in it a touch of compassion.

This terrible disease, hardness of heart is what aroused these feelings which our Saviour so seldom showed, and which, remaining unchanged or being intensified, must result in final condemnation. Jesus told His critics that divorce was only instituted in the law of Moses because of this disease, and He blamed His Apostles for it when they refused to believe the testimony of those who had reported His resurrection. There are, then, different degrees of hardness, all to be avoided but some much more serious than others. On two occasions in the A.V. the word is rendered "blindness," and indicates simply inability to "see straight"—in other words to realise the truth. Some examples of this are found in our readings this month.

The two occasions of the use of the actual words are the hardening of the disciples' hearts about the miraculous increase of loaves (6:52) and their failure to appreciate the warning against the leaven of the Pharisees and Herod (8:17). In both these cases we may have some sympathy with the disciples on account of our own weaknesses, and liability to miss or to misunderstand very important things. We might be like the "man with the muckrake" in Bunyan's story, who failed to see the glorious crown above his head through being too much occupied with raking in the dirt. The people indeed ate the loaves and

appreciated them, but failed to grasp the significance of the miracle—a greater than Moses or Solomon was there. So we place too much emphasis on material progress and too little on spiritual health. The phrase which Jesus used more than once—"He that hath ears to hear, let him hear"—of course has this significance. The parables were "earthly stories with heavenly meanings" and it requires a heavenly-directed mind to benefit by them—to recognise their truths. What rich refreshment and depth of instruction have been derived from these simple stories; we cannot measure their value and yet only a small number of the actual hearers got the blessings through understanding them. It seems strange perhaps that the disciples did not grasp the full significance of the stupendous miracles of the loaves, even when twice witnessed in such a graphic way and in the most astounding circumstances. Perhaps the meaning here is rather "blindness"—were their minds so to speak dazzled? The astonishment of those who witnessed the works of Jesus is reported frequently by Mark, and the hardness of heart consists in being witnesses and not taking the obvious course of listening to and believing in the Son of God.

Blindness to teaching was evidenced also in the misunderstanding of the disciples about the leaven. They applied the Saviour's figurative reference to physical bread just after witnessing the argument of the Pharisees asking for a sign when signs had been multiplied in front of their eyes. We suppose that Herod's leaven would be worldliness, that of the Pharisees hypocrisy, and of both of these all the followers of Jesus must beware. The lesson was lost because of a shortage of food, which need not have troubled them at all, especially in view of their experience when sent out to preach without material provision, and still more obviously after the miracles of the loaves and fishes. We can but think that where there is real faith, material provision will be of very secondary importance now; for if we put God's kingdom and His righteousness in its right place, there cannot be failure in supply.

But apart from these two cases where the words are used, our readings supply other illustrations. The attitude of His own countryfolk illustrates the same hardness or blindness (6:1-6). They saw Him, they heard Him, they knew of His works. They were astonished and marvelled, but they rejected Him. King Herod knew and could have heard—but expecting the same treatment as from the Baptist, and not strong enough to heed, doubtless avoided the issue. The Pharisees were witnesses of the works but valued their traditions more than the truth Jesus taught.

In contrast to all this hardening of mind and heart comes the compassion of Jesus. His sympathy and love were continually exercised. Every suppliant was sympathetically treated. His heart was softened, His ears were open, His eyes saw beyond the mere physical into the hearts of those about Him. Even when angry, and certainly justifiably so, there was compassion for the sinners. Their sad condition, and the consequences of continuing therein, were on His mind. He willed not that any should perish.

Do we get hardened? Have we a big enough sympathy for the lost? Have we sufficiently realised the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and the surpassing wonder of divine grace?

R. B. SCOTT.

CORRESPONDENCE

Dear Bro. Melling,—As you may know, the church in Tunbridge Wells is endeavouring to bring two coloured brethren from Africa who are earnestly seeking to gain a wider knowledge of God's work in the saving of many of their countrymen who have not yet found the life and joy of being a child of God.

We feel sure that God has a purpose and concern for them and we hope, with God's blessing, that we shall be able, in the near future, to accomplish this. The fund to date is £129, and to be able to do this we need £180 for two single fares. We are, therefore, asking if there are any who would be willing to help us and the two brothers from Africa by sending to me a gift, whilst however small or large, we shall gratefully accept.

Many have found that to be a Christian is truly a blessing. We must remember that there are others around us who need this same blessing. Let us think of them and pray for them. Our Lord says, "If ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." Send to: J. F. Styles, 36 North Farm Road, Tunbridge Wells, Kent.

NEWS FROM THE CHURCHES

Report on the Cameroons Evangelisation Fund.

No statement appeared in the February issue of the "S.S." as there was nothing at that time to report. Since the launching of the fund, however, the response, I am happy to say, has been very en-

couraging and no less than £24 has been contributed. This money was immediately dispatched to Bro. Elangwe with the exception of £5 which was withheld for the purchase of twenty bibles. The bibles have been purchased and sent out. Many of us possess two or more bibles but almost all members of the churches being planted in the Cameroons are without one—being abjectly poor.

I can purchase four good bibles for £1 and any brother or sister who has even a 10/- note to spare is asked to send it to this worthy cause—the purchase of bibles. Tracts and church literature are also vitally needed by the few brethren actively doing the preaching and personal work out there, and quantities of such literature would be a great encouragement to them.

Donations, no matter how tiny, for this purpose, will be thankfully received and immediately used. If things are going very slowly in the vicinity of your own congregation and the ground very hard, perhaps you would like to help in the sending of the Word of God to a land where some of our fellow-men are desperately keen to receive it, and to escape from superstition, ignorance and Roman Catholicism.

I have acknowledged all donations so far by letter, but would like, in this report, to thank a sister in the Reading area for an anonymous gift of £10.

Please send any contribution to: James R. Gardiner, 88 Davidson Terrace, Haddington, East Lothian, Scotland.

Hindley.—We have recently concluded a short mission, with the help of Bro. D. Dougall. January is not the best of months for such an effort, but we were blessed with dry, mild weather, and, as a result, the meetings were better attended than anticipated.

Our sincere thanks to all who attended from local assemblies to swell our numbers, and particularly to Bro. Dougall, who spared no effort to declare fully God's counsel to men.

Whilst unable to record any decisions for the Saviour, we at least have been strengthened and encouraged to "fight the good fight of faith, and to lay hold on eternal life."

Every blessing attend the succeeding efforts of our brother to enlarge God's kingdom. J. KEMP.

Loughborough.—We rejoice to report that on Lord's Day, January 19th, David Sharpe made the good confession and was baptised into Christ.

David, formerly with the Church of England, has been attending our meetings for some months. We thank God for this further evidence of His saving power. We pray that David might grow in grace and knowledge to be used of God to His glory. T.S.

OBITUARY

From Dewey Avenue Church of Christ, St. Marys, W. Va. bulletin for December 22nd, 1963):—

Brother Rockliff, whom we affectionately knew as "Uncle Ted" and who served this congregation so well for over twenty years, has gone to his reward. Those who were fortunate enough to know him well, and who saw his faith and devotion, both to God and to his fellowman, know that this departure is but the fruition of the hope that was within him and that his faith had overcome all fear attached to this transition.

He was born in Dalton-in-Furness, England, on March 21st, 1880. He had his early training in the ministry under Bro. Lancelot Oliver in Birmingham. He was active in the churches in England before coming to America in 1914. He served churches in the Detroit area for twenty years before coming to St. Marys, West Va. in 1934. Since this time he had become a well-known and respected figure here, which he chose to be his final resting place. His presence will be missed, but his influence will live on in the lives of many, both here and in many other places where he worked.

[The late Bro. Rockliff was uncle to Sister Mrs. Reary and Mrs. Cox, of the church in Ulverston, Lancs.]

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THE OXFAM HUNGER MILLION

We have received the following letter through Sis. E. Lawrence:—

Dear Mrs. Lawrence,—Thank you very much for your letter and the lovely blankets. We are very grateful for your help, too, in encouraging your old people in this work. These blankets are particularly valuable as they are very warm and very bright to cheer up the people who receive them. There are many people I know who will do knitting but I cannot get enough wool. So if you get more than you want, please let me have it. I enclose our wool leaflets which may be useful to you. I have plenty more of these if you want them.

Thank you again.

ROGER J. HOLMAN.

Dear sisters all,—To all the churches who have sent wool, etc. Greetings.

Please help me keep up this good work. Sincere thanks to you all.

EVA LAWRENCE.

[Please continue to send woollen squares and wool oddments to Sis. E. Lawrence, 8 Cromwell Road, St. Peters, Tunbridge Wells, Kent.]

BOUND VOLUMES

With a desire that every one who wishes to possess a Bound Volume of "S.S." for the years 1961-2-3 (one book) should have an opportunity to order, so that none is disappointed, the work of binding has been held up to this present date. An order received by 7th March will be accepted. No more than actually ordered will be bound. Orders to Paul Jones.

MARRIAGE

Kirkby-in-Ashfield (Beulah Road).—Wednesday, February 5th. Bro. Frank Longden to Sis. Jessie Atkin. We wish them a long and happy life together.

BIRTH

To Brenda and Keith Smith, Hindley, on February 2nd, a daughter, Janet Alison.

COMING EVENTS

Wigan (Albert Street, Newtown).—Gospel Meetings, D.V., from Tuesday, April 28th, each night except Friday, to Thursday, May 7th. All meetings at 7.30. Speaker: Bro. A. E. Winstanley. We give a hearty invitation to all members and friends to come and help us in our great effort to bring souls to the Master and extend his kingdom.

PRELIMINARY ANNOUNCEMENT

Tunbridge Wells (Community Centre, Oak Road).—Gospel Mission for two weeks beginning May 16th - 17th. Preacher: Frank Worgan. It is hoped that this mission will mark the start of our work in our new meeting-house. Book the dates.—A. E. Winstanley.

HINDLEY BIBLE SCHOOL

Saturday, May 16th, to Monday, May 18th, inclusive. Book the dates. Write for hospitality to: T. Kemp, 52 Argyle Street, Hindley, Wigan.

Conference Study weekend, 17th-19th April, 1965. In order to increase the effectiveness of these occasions, it is considered advisable to do some forward planning. Would any church or individual brother interested in offering facilities for these meetings and/or in the topic which would make a suitable follow-up to the studies based on John 17, (Eastwood, 28th/30th March, 1964), please write: A. Hood, 45 Park Road, Hindley, Wigan.

Ince-in-Makerfield (Wigan). — Holiday weekend (27th to 30th March, 1964). Special Meetings: **Friday, 27th March:** 3 p.m. Talk by Bro. Frank Worgan, followed by Questions and Discussion. Subject: "The 'Honest to God' Controversy." 5 p.m. (approx.) tea. 7.30 p.m. Gospel Preaching by Bro. Jerry Porter.

Saturday, 28th March: 10 a.m. Personal Work (door to door), 1 p.m. lunch, 3 p.m. Talk by Bro. Jack Thomason, followed by Questions and Discussion. Subject: "The Christian and the New Morality." 5 p.m. tea. 7.30 p.m. Gospel Preaching by Bro. Jerry Porter.

Sunday, 29th March: 10.30 a.m. Bible Classes, 11.30 a.m. Breaking of Bread, 3.0 p.m. Open-Air Meetings, 7.30 p.m. Gospel Preaching by Bro. Jerry Porter.

Monday, 30th March: 10 a.m. Your Questions Answered by a panel of brethren, 3 p.m. Talk by Bro. Carlton Mellington, followed by Questions and Discussion. Subject: "Computers and Paul's Epistles." 5 p.m. tea., 7.30 p.m. Gospel preaching by Bro. Jerry Porter. **Gospel Meetings to continue each evening (except Friday, 3rd April) at 7.30 p.m. until Sunday, 5th April, 1964.** Preaching by Bro. Jerry Porter.

We extend a warm invitation to the brethren. Accommodation will gladly be arranged for all who would like to spend the weekend with us. Write, giving details of your requirements to Bro. Brian Stevens, 2 Wigan Road, Ormskirk, Lancs.

WEEKEND CONFERENCE & BIBLE STUDY

28th-30 March, 1964, in the Secondary Modern School, Walker Street, Eastwood, Notts.

Business: Saturday 2 to 3 p.m.

Chairman: Bro. Chas Limb. Meetings to commence: Saturday, 6.30; Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, 7.30.

FOUR BIBLE STUDIES in the background of John 17. Each of the first three studies introduced by three short addresses; the fourth served by a panel.

Study 1: Saturday 3 to 5 p.m. The disciples first called themselves Christians in Antioch, Syria. **Who is a Christian?** E. Makin; E. Winter; T. Woodhouse.

Study 2: Saturday 6.30 to 8.30. Jesus lifted up his eyes to heaven and said, "Father; the hour has come; glorify thy Son that thy Son may glorify thee;—I pray for those who are to believe in me through their [the apostles'] word, that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." **The Oneness of Christians.** J. Daniell; A. Marsden.

Study 3: Monday 2 to 4 p.m. Those who were scattered from Jerusalem into Judea and Samaria by persecution, went about evangelising the glad tidings—the word. **Evangelisation.** G. Lodge; Tom Nisbet; Jack Thomason.

Study 4: Monday 4 to 5 p.m. Review of studies 1, 2 and 3. **Opportunities and Responsibilities Today.**

Emphasis: Memorisation of John 17. Jesus said to his Father in heaven in prayer for all Christians "... the glory which thou hast given me I have given to them; that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and thou in me, that they may become maturely one; so that the world may know that thou hast sent me and hast loved them even as thou hast loved me."

Meditation, prayer, praise, propaganda. Monday 6.30. Appeal "... to those who are to believe," but do not yet. T. Nisbet.

Teas: 5 to 6.30. Would brethren give generously in the collections? Besides the tea, there is the hire of the school and crockery. Do drop a p.c. to Bro. Chas Limb if you require tea Saturday and/or Monday.

Hospitality: Enquiries for hospitality to Bro. G. E. Bullock, 74 Station Road, Ilkeston, Derbys. **Other enquiries** to Chas Limb, 32 Chewton Street, Eastwood, Notts.

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EVANGELIST FUND: Contributions to R. McDONALD, who is also Secretary of Conference Committee, "Aldersyde," 10 Mardale Road, Bennett Lane, Dewsbury, York.

NYASALAND Mission: Contributions to W. STEELE, 31 Niddrie Road, Portobello, Edinburgh, Mid Lothian.

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