

The SCRIPTURE STANDARD

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

VOL.52 No.5

MAY 1984

LEST WE FALL

A few mornings ago the people of Leith woke up to find that a huge, well known, commercial building had disappeared and all that was left was some smoking embers and a few twisted girders. In a few hours fire had reduced a lifetime's business endeavour to cinders. This happens all the time, of course, and surely highlights the uncertainty of the future. Business empires, built up steadily over many generations, can very often disappear overnight because of fire, fraud, movements on the Stock Exchange, or political upheaval. Likewise a man can spend a lifetime in building up a good reputation (for personal integrity) and lose it in a moment because of some temporary lapse, or sudden indiscretion. Think of the number of respected schoolmasters who have had to move to another part of the country once they became Scoutmasters, or the number of vicars who have absconded with the young Choirmistress. I think it was Denis Healey who said that a week is a long time in politics, and this is true - we certainly never hear a word now about Cecil Parkinson, since he became the father of his secretary's child. There is, of course, a difference between *reputation* and *character*. It has been said that the nice, polished apples at the top of the barrel reflect the greengrocer's reputation, whereas the small damaged apples hidden underneath reflect his true character. Solomon said that "A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches," but many have preferred the latter and in doing so have besmirched the former. "How are the mighty fallen" was David's lament at the fall of Saul and Jonathan, but many thousands of the much less illustrious have fallen since, and are yet to fall. "Pride goes before a fall" we read in Proverbs, and none of us can afford to be complacent, or too confident. Let him that thinketh he standeth beware, lest he fall. Changes can happen overnight - a lifetime's endeavour can perish in a few hours. Who knows what a day can bring?

Written For Our Admonition. (1 Cor. 10)

When Paul exhorted the Christians at Corinth against the dangers of falling away from the church, how did he go about the task? How did he accomplish his purpose? He cites to them a portion of Jewish history. In the previous chapter Paul urged the Corinthian Christians to avoid all that might cause *weaker brethren* to fall, and referred to the efforts that he, himself, made to avoid being 'a castaway'. Paul, after all, went to great lengths, and worked with his own hands, that he might not be a burden on any church, and that he might always show an example worthy of copy. Paul admits the truth of Moses' words, "Thou shalt not

muzzle the ox" as having reference to preachers (more than to oxen) but notwithstanding this he preached at his own expense, and suffered all privations, lest he should hinder the gospel. Paul 'bent over backwards' in every situation that he might not offend a brother or cause a weaker brother to fall.

(1) The Analogy In this chapter (10) Paul includes *everybody* - not just 'the weaker brethren'. The portion of Jewish history he cites begins with the Jewish exodus from Egypt to Canaan, acting, as it does, as a type of the Christian's journey from here to heaven, from sin to salvation. The flight from Egypt by the Jews began with their 'baptism' in the cloud and in the Sea (The Red Sea). The sojourn of the Christian likewise begins with emergence from the watery grave of baptism. The Israelites having thus fled from Egypt, escaped from Pharaoh, and entered upon their march, with Moses as their leader, even as Christians leave the Egypt of sin behind, and start upon a new life, with Christ at their head. Theodoret, one of the church 'Fathers', endorses such an analogy and says, "The sea of transition (The Red Sea) represents the laver of regeneration, Moses foreshadows Christ, Israel the baptised disciples, the pursuing Egyptians are the sins left behind, and Pharaoh is a type of the devil." Having prefaced his remarks with the introduction of this general scenario, Paul proceeds to pursue his purpose and extract the lessons.

(2) The Similarity. Paul stresses that *all* the Israelites passed through the sea, and under the cloud, and "were *all* baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea". No preferential treatment was given - *all* entered the journey in the same way and on identical terms. So is it with the disciples of Christ in their baptism - *all* must pass through the bath of regeneration and *all* begin on the same footing and from the same starting point. There are no special dispensations for the favoured few. Similarly, says Paul, the Israelites did all eat the same spiritual meat (the manna) and drink the same spiritual drink (the spiritual rock which followed them, and that was Christ). Faced with these facts; that no preferential treatment was recognised amongst literal Israel, and that the analogy between the sojourn of the Israelites and the Christian life was a valid one, the Corinthians could hardly object to Paul's comparisons. All the Corinthians had been baptised and all were eating the same spiritual meat and drinking the same spiritual drink.

(3) The Sins and consequences. Notwithstanding all that God had accomplished on behalf of literal Israel, "God was not well pleased" with many of them, says Paul, and overthrew many thousands of them in the wilderness. "Now these things were our examples," continues Paul, "to the intent that we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted." Many of the Israelites yearned to return to the 'fleshpots of Egypt', of course, just as there may be some in the church who might occasionally cast a longing glance back at the practices of sin. "Neither be ye idolaters", says Paul, "as were some of them." To be guilty of idolatry does not necessitate the setting up of an Icon or totem-pole and our bowing down to it, but such a sin can consist of virtually anything we allow to come between us and our Saviour. Paul then refers to the sin of fornication (which was one of the besetting sins of the Corinthians) and says that because of this sin 23,000 Israelites died in only one day (Num. 24:9). "Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. Numbers 21 describes how the children of Israel "were much discouraged because of the way" and spake against Moses and against God, saying "wherefore hast thou brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness?" The fiery serpents bit many and

"much people of Israel died". Paul in recounting the tragedy adds, "Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer".

(4) **The lesson.** The Corinthians are thus invited to reflect upon what befell the children of Israel in their wanderings subsequent to their escape from bondage. Many Jews failed to see the land of glory because of the sins just described by Paul - (1) a desire for evil things: (2) idolatry: (3) fornication: (4) Discontent in times of hardship: (5) a desire to return to old ways, and back into sin. "Now all these things" concludes Paul, "happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for *our admonition*, upon whom the ends of the world are come. *Wherefore*, let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." God, apparently, still deals with sin in this final dispensation (in which *we* live) as He did with Israel of old, and so we should profit by a consideration of these historical facts. *Presumption* is the greatest of all dangers, and we are less likely to fall if we are conscious of the possibility. He who realises the danger will be on his guard. No-one is too strong to fall - none is immune.

It Can't Happen To Me

Clearly Paul had never heard of the 'Once saved - always saved' doctrine which still seems to float about in the world. His admonition to the Corinthians to 'take heed lest they fall' was surely extremely foolish if they could not possibly fall. I suggest that the doctrine (Once saved - always saved) began in the Garden Of Eden, and originated with the devil. God said to Adam and Eve "Thou shalt surely die" if you disobey - in contradiction the devil said, "Thou shalt not surely die". The apostle Paul says that Christians can readily fall - the devil says that Christians cannot fall. Paul was not alone in his many exhortations to steadfastness. The apostle Peter also urged his brethren "...to give diligence to make your calling and election sure; for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall." Making our calling sure depends, it seems, upon us being *diligent*. If we *do these things*, says Peter, we shall never *fall*. What things? - adding to our faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience Godliness; and to Godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity (love). If we *do these things*, says Peter, we shall never fall. The New Testament teems with warnings, admonitions, exhortations, urgings and beseechings by Christ's apostles that we should remain steadfast in the faith. The writer to the Hebrews laments the waywardness of the children of Israel and refers to God's disgust of them during their 40 years in the wilderness. He adds that Christians too could fall for the same reason - "Take heed brethren, lest haply there should be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in falling away from the living God" Heb. 3:12. "Let us therefore fear" he says, "lest a promise being left us of entering into His rest any of you should seem to come short of it." (Heb. 4:1).

Let us not be influenced by the 'Once saved - always saved' syndrome, even although it may come to us from fervent evangelical people. It is difficult to believe that Ananias and Sapphira, or Demas, died in a 'saved' condition. Neither let us place any confidence in man, whose breath is in his nostrils, for we see, even from our own short history as churches of Christ that men (and congregations) are liable to slide into denominationalism, and that each hundred years we need a fresh 'Restoration Movement'. A fire during the night can destroy a vast building - one generation of careless Christians can lead the church into sinful (albeit popular) digression. It is easy to be swayed by the crowd and look for 'safety' in numbers. Human reasoning declared the '*Titanic*' unsinkable. "How are the

mighty fallen" wailed David in stunned disbelief. "Who shall separate us from the love of God?" asks Paul, "Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" No, none of these things, "neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God." (Rom. 8:35). What then, indeed, can separate us from the love of Christ? *Only we, ourselves, can. External forces* cannot separate us from God's love, but *our own indifference* can. Like the Laodiceans, if we become lukewarm, Jesus will spew us out of His mouth. It is plain that we can separate ourselves from God's love because Jude exhorts us (21) to "Keep ourselves in the love of God". Jesus, Himself, said "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love."

We can all think of many fine brethren, who formerly walked with us but whom we never now see. This is truly sad but should not be allowed to weaken our own resolve to continue steadfast to the end. Presumption, I suppose, is the danger (that it could never happen to us) and doubtless prompted the words of Paul "Let him that thinketh he standeth beware, lest he fall."

EDITOR

THE BIBLE IS TO BLAME?

Being interested in what people have to say about the Bible, it came as rather a shock to hear that wars, misery, broken relationships and personal suffering, have been caused by the Bible. At least that is the view of some people. Saying the Bible is the cause involves those who believe the Bible as well. They are partners in crime, so to speak.

Although this sentiment has popular appeal how true is it in fact?

Admittedly "Christianity" is to blame for some of the worlds more shameful deeds. When one thinks of the established church spreading its faith through the conquests of Charlemagne; or those anti Jewish riots which periodically broke out in Europe, as revenge for Christ's death; or even the Inquisition, it certainly leaves religion reeling under the weight of its own hypocrisy.

But which religion? Not the religion of the Bible, because the Bible tells us *how* the Good News was to be conveyed. "Go into all the world and PREACH the gospel". To spread the gospel in any other way is not according to the Bible. "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you", the Bible says. Had people lived by the book, persecutions would never have taken place. The Bible is not to blame!

On a personal level things are no different. Take the story of Elijah and Ahab; Ahab the king had all the vices, a rotter if ever you came across one. He was not happy with the state of the nation and was troubled within himself. One day he met Elijah and greeted him accusingly, "Is this you, you troubler of Israel". Elijah responded by pointing out that Ahab was the culprit because he refused to walk by the word of God. It's not the person who refuses to get drunk, tell lies, steal, or be immoral who causes problems. It's the people who do all of these things who are guilty. *The real felon* is the one who does not live by God's standard of right and wrong - the Bible.

Funny how many people get it wrong way around!!

STEVE KEARNEY, 140 Woodlawn Park Grove, Firhouse, Dublin

GLEANINGS

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

THE WONDERFUL

"His name shall be called Wonderful" Isaiah 9:6

"Jesus was wonderful in the opposites and seeming antagonisms of his nature. You want things logical and consistent, and you say, "How could Christ be God and man at the same time?" John says Christ was the creator: "All things were made by Him, and without Him was not any thing made." Matthew says that he was omnipresent: "Where two or three are met together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Christ declares his own eternity: "I am Alpha and Omega." How can he be a lion, under his foot crushing kingdoms, and yet a lamb licking the hand that slays him? At what point does the throne and the manger touch? If Christ was God, why flee into Egypt? Why not stand his ground? Why, instead of bearing the cross, not lift up his right hand and crush his assassins? Why stand and be spit upon? Why sleep on the mountain, when he owned the palaces of eternity? Why catch fish for his breakfast on the beach in the chill morning, when all the pomegranates are his, and all the vineyards his, and all the cattle his, and all the partridges his? Why walk when weary, and his feet stone-bruised, when he might have taken the splendours of the sunset for his equipage, and moved with horses and chariots of fire? Why beg a drink from the wayside, when out of the crystal chalices of eternity he poured the Euphrates, the Mississippi, and the Amazon, and dipping his hand in the fountains of heaven, and shaking that hand over the world, from the tips of his fingers dripped the great lakes and the oceans? Why let the Roman regiment put him to death, when he might have ridden down the sky followed by all the cavalry of heaven, mounted on white horses of eternal victory? You cannot understand. Who can? You try to confound me. I am confounded before you speak. Paul said it was unsearchable. He went climbing up from argument to argument, and from antithesis to antithesis, and from glory to glory, and then sank down in exhaustion as he saw far above him other heights of divinity unscaled, and exclaimed, "that in all things he might have the PRE-EMINENCE"."

T. De Witt Talmage.

WE QUOTE - ABRAHAM LINCOLN

"When I read aloud, two senses catch the idea: first, I see what I read; second, I hear it, and therefore I can remember it better."

"My mind, is like a piece of steel - very hard to scratch anything on it, but almost impossible, after you get it there, to rub it out."

"If you are resolutely determined to make a lawyer of yourself, the thing is more than half done already... Always bear in mind that your own resolution to succeed is more important than any other one thing."

WISE WORDS

"Be such a man, live such a life, that if every man were such a man as you, and every life like yours, this earth would be God's paradise."

Phillips Brooks

THE OLD WOMAN'S QUESTION

"After an infidel had concluded a lecture in a village in England, he challenged those present to discussion. Who should accept the challenge but an old, bent woman, in antiquated attire, who went up to the lecturer and said:

"Sir, I have a question to put to you."

"Well, my good woman, what is it?"

"Ten years ago," she said, "I was left a widow, with eight children utterly unprovided for, and nothing to call my own but this Bible. By its direction, and looking to God for strength, I have been enabled to feed myself and family. I am now tottering to the grave; but I am perfectly happy, because I look forward to a life of immortality with Jesus. That's what my religion has done for me. What has your way of thinking done for you?"

"Well, my good lady," rejoined the lecturer, "I don't want to disturb your comfort; but—"

"Oh! that's not the question," said she; keep to the point, sir. What has your way of thinking done for you?"

The infidel endeavoured to shirk the matter again; the meeting gave vent to uproarious applause, and the champion had to go away discomfited by an old woman".

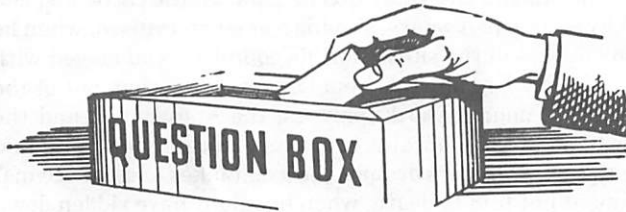
H. L. Hastings

MORE SERMONS IN SHOES

"We want more sermons in Shoes, men and women going up and down the roads of life preaching Christianity by their imitation of Christ."

Cuyler

Selected by Leonard Morgan



Conducted by
Alf Marsden

"What is the role of the church in the world today, and should the church establish Bible Schools and Colleges for the teaching and training of members so that they can fulfil that role?"

At first glance there appears to be two questions here, and when the question was originally sent to me I must confess that I looked at it in this way, but on reflection I suppose the questioner is really asking, "What needs to be done in the way of teaching and training so that the church *can* fulfil any role which it may have to assume in the world." Anyway, it is along these lines that I propose to deal with the question and my earnest prayer is that something helpful can be said.

The Role of the Church

The Church is an entity. Its functions, at least as I have learned from the N.T., are threefold; to worship God; to provide a haven of fellowship for its members; and to preach the Gospel. Whether these functions have always been realised is a different matter entirely. I believe the functions I refer to have been in existence ever since the Church began, and I personally see no reason why they should not remain in force as long as the Lord tarries. Furthermore, the fact that the Church is comprised of individual communities of Christians, each community having its own autonomy, should not interfere in any way with God's arrangement, i.e., that the worship of God should be the same inter-community; that inter-community fellowship should be a reality and not a fond hope; and that the same Gospel should be preached by all. With some reservation I believe that we can say that we have achieved the latter; the former remains a pious hope; and the tragedy is that fellowship can never be *true* fellowship until the 'pious hope' is

realised. It is difficult to say, but it *must* be said, that the personalities of some who have purported to lead the Church have actually *interfered* with God's purpose for the Church. The role of the Church remains as it has always been; it is the functional parts *within* that role which need some serious investigation.

The Worship Function

Jesus said to the woman at the well of Sychar, "But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshipper shall worship the Father in Spirit and in truth: For the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:23,24).

Although worship is not specifically defined in Scripture, the word means "to make obeisance" "to do reverence to", and it conveys the idea not so much of a particular type of Church service, but rather of a wholly dedicated life to God, in which God is revered by those who do not wish to displease Him. I suppose it is an acknowledgement of this idea which has led men in all ages to try to outdo each other in building cathedrals and temples to His name; in filling such edifices with expensive and ornate fitments; in ensuring that such traditions are continued down the ages. The tragedy is that in their desire to express the majesty of God they have prostituted the truth, and have come to look upon the physical substance of that which they have erected as greater than the One who inspired them in the first place. They have forgotten that Jesus said, "This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouths and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." (Matt. 15:8,9).

The Church should look dispassionately at what it calls its "worship service". If worship means a dedicated, obedient, and reverent life toward God, then no matter what we may designate as "times of worship", if we do not on such occasions worship as *He* wants us to, and as He has indicated in His Word, then our so-called worship will be as "strange fire". The passionate arguments which have arisen around the subject of Church worship have done nothing to encourage fellowship; rather the reverse has been the case. We have been so keen on insisting upon the maintenance of congregational autonomy that we have failed to see — or have ignored — the widening cracks in Church fellowship. Is it *really* the case that we lack the wisdom to discern what God wants us to do when we worship, or is it because we have the desire to do what *we* think is the way to please Him. Remember Cain!

The Fellowship Function

The greatest idea of fellowship that the world has ever seen is enshrined in those immortal words of the Saviour as recorded by John, "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word: That they all may be one; as thou Father art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one" (John 17:20-23). If the fellowship of the saints here on earth is an extension of the Divine nature, which the words of Jesus suggest that it is, then our attitude to each other sometimes is a gross misrepresentation of what the case ought to be. What the world needs to see is a caring, loving, and closely integrated Christian society, intent on building itself up instead of indulging in internecine struggles. It needs to see Church members who are courageous enough to acknowledge their own misdemeanours without trying to blame someone else. It needs to see communities of Christians who have subdued self and are intent only on doing God's will. It needs to see a Church

where personal ego and self-elevation have disappeared and have been replaced by humility. It needs to see a Church where leadership is honoured and not undermined. It needs to see a Church whose life is Christ, whose hope is Christ, whose destination is heaven, and whose fellowship on earth is a perfect portrayal of the life of heaven. This, I believe, is what Jesus had in mind when He prayed to His Father. This is the role of the Church. If we are partakers of the divine nature as Peter says then the foregoing must *always* be the role of the Church, otherwise we will have to say so far as the Church is concerned that human nature will inevitably gain the ascendancy over divine nature; that is a proposition which I find to be spiritually unacceptable.

The Gospel Function

It is to this function that most people ascribe the need for teaching and training within the church, and it is true to say that whatever training has been given has been related to this area of work almost exclusively. Personally, I consider this to have been a great mistake because there are other areas of the Church's work which are equally important, e.g., the training of Elders and Deacons; the instruction and care of young people; the training in special skills needed for the promotion of the Gospel by *any* church member; visitation, etc., and so we could go on.

Why has so much insistence been placed on the provision of full-time workers in order to fulfil the preaching function? Furthermore, one might ask why it has been found necessary to train such people in colleges and Bible schools. I can understand the need for formal instruction in certain subjects, but beyond that point it would appear that we are confronted with administrative and financial problems which we could do very well without. In addition to this, some would say that a ministerial elite is being created. If this is so, intentional or otherwise, then I can see a number of dangers, not the least of which is an evangelist-based body of teaching which may run counter to the teaching given in individual assemblies, e.g., there is much confusion on the subjects of head covering; the posture to be adopted when singing and praying; insensitive instructions for the governing of assemblies; the non-alignment of the roles of Elders and Deacons and Evangelists; and ill-thoughtout attitudes to the increasingly sensitive areas of separation and divorce.

It has been said that denominational ministries have been the refuge for those of questionable competence in other fields, but are we free from this in the Church? It seems that one has only to express the desire to be a full-time worker, gather some financial support, and attend a course at some Bible school. As regards standards, it may be argued that these are set at the schools, but even if we accept this we are faced with the problem of external course moderation, and at the end of the day it must be a subjective assessment as to the standard of competence of students *in fields other than strict Bible knowledge*, i.e., human relations, motivation, and the behavioural sciences. It is in such fields of knowledge and practice that the most challenging Church problems are to be met; it is also here that we are experiencing our most notable failures.

It is not easy to question methods which seem to produce spectacular results in some areas, but on the other hand I remember the days when the great theme was to train and develop our young people in the local assemblies to which they belonged, under the guidance of well-informed Elders; that concept I believe is still valid.

It is a fundamental principle of leadership to know the way ahead, and the ultimate destination. Sometimes I get the impression that the Church is being

allowed to travel in directions which may be financially or spiritually expedient at the time, rather than there being a clear idea as to where we want the Church to be, say, in the 21st century. History will either condemn or applaud our efforts, but of one thing I am sure: the Church today is not what our forefathers envisaged it being.

What, then, *is* the role of the Church? I believe it is to present a united front to the world and not an amalgam of conflicting doctrines and practices. I strongly maintain that the Church should be assembly-based, with the preaching and teaching coming from brothers who have been trained by the assembly, the effort spreading out from the assembly; all this, of course, under the guidance of spiritual and well-informed Elders. I would also like to see the leaders of assemblies in the British Isles occasionally sharing a retreat somewhere so that spiritual and practical problems could be discussed in a quiet and peaceful manner without binding anything and anyone. Then, given the right spirit, I believe the Church would begin to realise its hopes and aspirations in the God-approved areas of worship, fellowship, and Gospel promotion. Brethren have died longing to see a truly united Church, is it just a dream that *we* should try to accomplish something toward that laudable aim?

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

SCRIPTURE READINGS

JUNE 1984

3—Psalm 103	James 5
10—Isaiah 52	Rom. 1:1-17
17—Genesis 9	Rom. 1:18-32
24—Isaiah 1:1-17	Rom. 2:1-16

ABOUT THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS

Date Probably late 58 or early 59 A.D.

Place Corinth. Proof: Cenchrea is mentioned (16:1) which was the harbour town for Corinth. There are salutations from Erastus who was the treasurer of Corinth (16:23). Also, there are salutations from Gaius who lived in Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:14).

Writer Tertius (16:22), but dictated by the apostle Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Paul was a Roman citizen who was eager to visit the capital of the Empire for the first time. For good reasons he had been hindered in the past from travelling to Rome (15:22), but now an opportunity had come. However, Rome was not to be his

terminus. Spain had that distinction (15:24). Things were happening in Spain and Paul, as ever, wanted to be where the action is.

Purpose The apostle Paul sent this letter to Rome for a number of reasons. One thing he especially requested of them was to pray for him - pray for his delivery from the unbelievers in Judea, and pray for the Jerusalem Christian's acceptance of the financial gift he was carrying from the gentile saints (15:26 & 31).

Authenticity Thomas Hartwell Horne has written: "That this epistle has always been acknowledged to be a genuine and authentic production of Paul, is attested not only by the ancient Syriac and Latin versions, but by the express declarations and quotations of Irenaeus, Theophilus of Antioch, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Origen, and by all subsequent ecclesiastical writers. It was also cited or alluded to by the apostolic fathers Barnabas, Clement of Rome, Ignatius, Polycarp, and by the churches of Vienne and Lyons."

Establishment The apostle Paul did not establish the church at Rome. When he dictated this letter he was addressing a church he himself had never visited. The congregation was probably planted by converts who had responded to the first gospel message delivered by the apostle Peter on that eventful day of Pentecost (Acts 2:10), and who subsequently returned to Rome.

Roman Society F. W. Farrar in his book *The Early Days of Christianity* has written: "The epoch which witnessed the early growth of Christianity was an epoch of which the horror and degradation have rarely been equalled, and perhaps never exceeded, in the annals of mankind... I need but make a passing allusion to the enormous wealth of that period; its unbounded self-indulgence; its course and tasteless luxury; its greedy avarice; its sense of insecurity and terror; its apathy, debauchery, and cruelty; its hopeless fatalism; its unspeakable sadness and weariness; its strange extravagances alike of infidelity and superstition... (For example) At the lowest extreme of the social scale were millions of slaves, without family, without religion, without possessions, who had no recognised duties, passing normally from a childhood of degradation to a manhood of hardship, and an old age of unpitied neglect. Only a little above the slaves stood the lower classes who formed the vast majority of the freeborn inhabitants of the Roman Empire. They were, for the most part, beggars and idlers, familiar with the grossest indignities of an unscrupulous dependence... Two phrases sum up the characteristics of Roman civilisation in the days of the Empire - heartless cruelty, and unfathomable corruption." Such was the world in which the early saints lived. They certainly had it a lot harder than we.

Theme The main theme of this epistle is *justification by faith*. What do we mean by these two terms? Faith is based on the word of God. Indeed, without the word there could be no faith in Jesus. Paul himself wrote: "So faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God (Romans 10:17). May I share with you a statement from W. Carl Ketcherside which should help us here. "Now it is true that faith is the belief of testimony but it is not mere mental assent to the veracity of that testimony. It goes far beyond this. It involves the surrender of self without reservation to him who is the object of faith. Faith in Christ is a pledge of allegiance to Christ. Inherent in it is the idea of trust which leads to commitment, the utter abandonment of one's self to another in the full confidence that what he has promised he will do". Alexander Campbell wrote in similar terms. "Any belief, then, that does not terminate in our personal confidence in Jesus as the Christ, and to induce trustful submission to Him, is not faith unfeigned, but a dead faith, and can not save the soul".

Justification is a legal term. It is the antonym of condemnation. To stand justified before God is to be guiltless. It is to be righteous, to sustain a right relationship with God. William Barclay has written: "In Greek the word to justify is *dikaioun*. Greek verbs which end in *-oun* do not mean to make a person something; they mean to treat, to reckon, to account a man as being something. And when Paul speaks of God justifying the sinner he means that God, instead of punishing the sinner, instead of issuing a penalty like a righteous but merciless judge, treats the sinner as if he had been a good man". Thanks be to Jesus who has made this possible! He, the sinless one, identified Himself with sinful mankind. Indeed, "God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God

in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21). Notice that: *in Him*. When a person gives up his life on earth, the life of sin, and becomes identified with Jesus in his sinlessness, then God declares that person justified. It's that simple!

APOSTOLIC GREETING

Paul in his greetings to the saints at Rome mentions their faith in Christ Jesus which was spoken of throughout the whole world. They are an example to us all. Probably this was not a large congregation. But you do not need to be a big church to have great faith.

Verse sixteen of chapter one is, I am sure, well known to all Christians. Here it is in another translation, with verse 17 included. "I am not ashamed of the good news about Christ, for it is God's dynamic to restore to a state of wholeness all who believe it, the Jew first, but also the gentile. For in the good news is announced God's programme of justification by faith, in order to produce faith, for it was long since recorded that the just will live by faith." That last statement means that without faith you are dead. You have no life of your own. You are under condemnation.

THE GENTILE

The world at the time this epistle was written was divided into two classes - Jew and gentile. Paul deals with the latter first. The gentile was the one who tried to make it on man's wisdom and of course failed. The latter verses of chapter one reveal his downward course. They make quite shocking reading. Verses 21-23 identify the seven steps of degradation. Each of the verses 24, 26 and 28 contains the declaration that God gave man up. If we read the whole passage carefully we can see why.

Let us examine some of the terms as they are translated in the Authorised Version and see how, for example, Barclay handles them. *Unrighteousness*. "The man who is unrighteousness

or evil is the man who robs man and God of their rights." *Wickedness*. "It is destructive badness." *Covetousness*. "The spirit which will pursue its own interest with complete disregard for the rights of others." *Maliciousness*. "This is viciousness. It is the degeneracy out of which all sins grow and in which all sins flourish." *Full of envy*. "This is the most warped and twisted of human emotions. It is a grudging thing." *Strife*. "Contention which is born of envy, ambition, the desire of prestige, and place and prominence." *Deceit*. "Describes the crafty cunning of the plotting intriguer who is found in every community and society." *Malignity*. "The spirit which always supposes the worst about other people." *Despiteful*. "It is the sadism which finds delight in hurting others simply for the sake of hurting them." *Boasters*. "These are pretentious men, snobs." *Without understanding*. "Speaks of the fool, the man who cannot learn the lesson of experience." *Without natural affection*. "The natural bonds of human affection have been destroyed."

THE JEW

The Jew was the man who trusted in legal rectitude. In the end he condemned himself by his judgment of others. He saw the speck in someone else's eye, but did not consider the plank in his own eye (Matthew 7). He thought he was free from the judgment of God simply because he was one of God's elect. He could not have been more wrong. If he sinned he was as guilty as an unrighteous gentile. And here is the other point. If a gentile did good he was as worthy as an obedient Jew. "For there is no partiality with God" (2:11).

Dear reader, no one can be justified by law. You see, the problem lies not with the law but with the human being. Justification therefore has to be on a different plane - believing instead of achieving. "The law was our tutor to

bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith." (Galatians 3:24). It's a better plane too!

Ian Davidson, Motherwell

BELIEF : (21)

Life

IN view of recent scientific investigation into the meaning and origin of life, and the difficulty scientists have to find a vocabulary to explain their discoveries, it is not surprising that the Scriptures do not give a full explanation of life. May the reason not be that man is not meant, in the divine purpose, to understand the meaning and origin of life?

Considering the mis-use to which man's knowledge has been put through the ages - with tragic results to the human race - this may well be a blessing.

"I am the life"

This is one of our Lord's most profound remarks (John 14:6). John described him as the light of life, the light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world. He says that all things were made by him and nothing is made that was not made by him (John 1:1-9).

Strange and mysterious words, to be sure. They show that God himself had allotted the function of creation to his Son.

The blessedness of life

The creative activity of the Son was supplemented by the work of the third Person in the Godhead, the Holy Spirit.

In this connection, is there significance in the visit of *three* men to Abraham on the threshold of his career as God's friend and the means of blessing to all nations? "In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 12:3; 8:2; Isaiah 41:8).

The mystery of life

Here we are dealing with the sublime and mysterious currents of life

itself, for which no explanation is given by God. We can but dimly understand with our limited reason, that God, in the three Persons named in the Bible (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) has never been alone, but has always had companionship. In him is contained all that we know or can know of perfection, truth, justice, goodness, mercy and even life itself.

How wonderful that God deigned to make us in his own image. Surely that is why we can instinctively appreciate divine attributes without the need of a philosophical explanation of them.

Proof

What further witness do we need of the truth that God the Creator *is*, other than *we ourselves*? "Ye are my witnesses" says God to all nations, "and my servant whom I have chosen [his beloved Son-], that ye may know and believe me and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me. I, even I, am the Lord, and beside me there is no Saviour." (So much for false religions which many misguidedly follow).

Explanation

Is any explanation necessary of the blessedness of the salvation he offers to the creatures of his almighty hand? Or of the mystery of why such things should be so? Is it not sufficient that he has said "I am the life"; and "Without the shedding of blood is no remission of sins"?—since it is he who gives life and forgives sin. And the blessedness of life eternal and of sins forgiven can have no meaning at all unless God our Creator, Heavenly Father and Saviour is involved in it.

Exercises in Belief

Genesis 1:26-27; Deuteronomy 30:10-20; Psalms 36:9; 66:8-9; 133; John 3:36; 5:20-30; 6:35-40; 11:25; 20:31; Acts 17:22-34; 2 Timothy 1:8-12; 1 John 1; 5:12; Revelation 2:7; 22:14.

W. BROWN

(To be continued)

WHAT IS LIFE?

James asked a very important question in James 4:14 when he said, "Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life?" And then in the same verse answered the question, "It is even a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away." James has therefore referred to life as a vapour that appears and disappears. Nothing is more unstable than a vapour, and it is an excellent representation of the brevity of life, and the fleeting and unstable existence characteristic of all who live in this world. One of the definitions that Webster gives to life is the "span between birth and death." And this is about right as far as physical life is concerned. Thus, even at its longest, is but very short.

Not only does James try to tell us what life is, but time and time again ancient writers try to impress us with representations of life, such as water spilled on the ground; a flying shadow which flits across the sky and in whose shade the toiler rests briefly and looks up only to find that it has flown away; a frail and fragile flower; a sleep; a dream; a handbreadth; a tale that is told; a long journey one is about to undertake. These are all inspiration's answers to what is your life.

So I hope you can see through all of these representations that life is very short, and that they are written to spur us on to develop ourselves and prepare ourselves for eternity where there is no ending of life. Seeing that life is very short, I believe the scriptures would have us live a day at a time. "But exhort one another daily, while it is called today; lest anyone of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."

I think we would be well within the mark by saying that life is the gift of God. But even at that, life is only what we as individuals make it. We can make it a destitute life, void of

happiness and doomed to destruction. Or on the other hand, we can make it a life of joy and happiness and a life which will be resurrected to eternal bliss.

It was Benjamin Franklin who said, "Dost thou love life? then do not squander time, for that is the stuff that life is made of." The apostle Paul confirmed in Eph. 5:16, "Redeeming the time for the days are evil." Basically, how we use our time is what our life is. We can use it for God or we can use it for Satan. It is just what we make it.

On the walls of an ancient temple there is a picture of a king and a slave. The king is forging his crown into a chain, while nearby the slave forges his chain into a crown. Beneath the picture are these words: "Life is what man makes it, no matter of what it is made.

The Son of God, Jesus himself, knew how to forge chains into a crown. The apostle Paul knew how to forge a chain into a crown, he knew how to transform his prison cells into a pulpit, for you see, he found not only in his trouble a chance to strengthen himself, but also an opportunity to glorify God. It was he who said, "I have finished my course," which is to say, "I've lived my life."

Could we say of ourselves, "I have lived" - or have we even begun to live? It is not enough to say we have lived the allotted seventy years. But the important thing is, what have we done in that seventy years? This is what we must give an account of. Yes, **THIS IS YOUR LIFE!**

*The clock of life is wound but once
And no man has the power
To tell just when the hand will stop
At late or early hour.*

*Now is the only time you own-
Live, love, toil with a will!*

*Place no faith in tomorrow;
For the hands may then be still*

Raymond Stiner
Le Contes Mills, Pa.

BE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT (Eph 5:15-21)

We are exhorted by the Apostle Paul to take note of the awareness and presence of God in our lives. It would seem that in many, spiritual enthusiasm is lacking. We are not, of course, expected to become religious fanatics. Nevertheless we are expected to show healthy enthusiasm toward the Spirit: "Be not foolish-but understand". Eph 5:17.

Today, many tend to strangle the Spirit that lies within us; we keep Him locked up in a corner of our heart, thus limiting His guidance. To be filled with the Spirit, should be, the aim of every Christian. There are, at least, three conditions for being filled with the Spirit.

1. To be filled with the Spirit, one must have a deep faith.
2. To be filled with the Spirit, one must fervently pray.
3. To be filled with the Spirit, one must be obedient.

It is well known in the physical sense, that if we are out of sorts, we are not a 100% fit. Something is amiss. We do not function properly. A tonic is needed, and that makes sense. In things Spiritual, it is the same. If out of sorts we miss out on that 100%. But praise the Lord, there is a tonic to remedy this; The Holy Spirit. If we wish, we may indeed drink freely at the well of abundance, for up-lift.

To be filled with the spirit, we must have real, deep, sincere faith. Have we assessed our faith recently? Are we below that 100% mark? Does our faith need nourishment? To experience the fullness of the Spirit we must let Him have free course through our entire being. To be filled with the Spirit, we

must pray regularly. In scripture we are exhorted time and time again about the great importance of humble prayer. A weak prayer life causes the Christian to be low in faith and lackfulness of the Spirit. Take time to be holy. Prayer surpasses all.

To be filled with the Spirit, one must be obedient. If ambassadors for Christ, we must be in complete harmony with God's will. It is only when we are obedient to God's commands that the Spirit can truly fill us. God uses only clean instruments in His work.

Not by might, Nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord. (Zec. 4:6).

If we would do God's work, in God's world, in God's way, for God's glory, we must do it in the power that comes in, and through the Holy Spirit. The power is available: God Cares.

Dear reader are you in good Spirit? Is the good spirit in you? My prayer is, that it is.

Andrew P. Sharp, Newtongrange

TOO LATE

The foolish virgins of Christ's parable faced the fact that there is a point in life at which no excuses will avail.

The door was shut. There is absolutely nothing to be done about it. All action should have been taken beforehand. Now it is too late.

But the important thing to remember is that the arrival at the inexorable point of hopelessness is always the culmination of what has gone before; and that this desperate plight is avoidable if we are continually ready.

Many of us are going to do great things - tomorrow. But tomorrow never comes. For the only day we have is today. And this corrupting habit of running behind schedule - even in small things - has for its inevitable result the bringing of us face to face

with a shut door. Opportunity always seems to knock when we are busy.

The demand that life makes on all of us is to be ready at all times, to live neither in the past nor in the future but in the present.

Until we learn that lesson, we cannot escape the certain consequence that we shall one day stand, sorrowful but too late, before the one door through which we desire to enter but cannot - because it is shut. Selected

NEWS FROM THE CHURCHES

Tranent: The Tranent Social meeting was held on Saturday 31st March in the Primary School, when a goodly attendance enjoyed a rich time of fellowship. The chairman was brother John Colgan and the speakers were Andrew Sharp, Newtongrange, and John McLuckie, Haddington. We expected the attendance to be reduced owing to many brethren from the Motherwell area attending the Golden Wedding of bro. and sister L. Purcell, but we were pleasantly surprised by the large attendance, some from Peterhead, Kirkcaldy and from all over. The speakers did not let us down and gave much food for thought. Bro. Sharp spoke on the need for evangelism and bro. McLuckie on the theme "Because I live; ye shall live also". Sister Wilson and sister Gray sang uplifting solos, as did brother Andrew Sharp (one of the two speakers). A good time was had by all and we look forward to the next one.

John Colgan (Sec)

DESIRE

"One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in His temple."

Psalm 27:4. The psalmist here expresses his inmost desire to know the Lord. To him the temple at Jerusalem is the dwelling place of His God, and to be there is to be in fellowship with Him.

He also voices his conviction that it requires effort on his part by saying "That will I seek after." The fulfillment of desire will not come by doing nothing. Having a goal in mind is good, but staying where you are will not reach it. There is a need of pressing toward that at which you are aiming.

The apostle Paul had a desire to be with the Lord, so he turned his back on the past which was distasteful to him, and pressed forward the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

What are our desires? Are they for our eternal good? Then "Let us lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily besets us, and let us run with patience the race which is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith."

Tom Kemp, Hindley.

OBITUARY

DALMELLINGTON: It is with sorrow that we wish to record the passing from this life of our sister Christina Ferguson on March 8th, 1984. Formerly of the church at Kilbirnie, "Chrissie" as she was affectionately known, was of a quiet and determined nature and was a good example of her Lord, those meeting her being the better for having done so. Having been faithful in this life we look forward to the day when we shall meet her with our Lord in heaven. (Rev. 14:13). May the Lord of all comfort help all those who mourn. The funeral at Kilbirnie was conducted by brother William Black, assisted by brother D. Chalmers and brother L. Purcell.

Harry McGinn (Sec)

AN APPEAL

BOUND VOLUMES of the Scripture Standard are required by David Ferguson. If any brethren can help please contact him at: 40 Helmsley Way, CORBY, Northants.

MOST IMPORTANT

'THE church is your most important experience of life.'

To understand this statement one must understand what the church is. The church is the spiritual body of Christ — not a conglomeration of sectarian bodies, of denominations formed by man.

Jesus said upon this rock I will build my church, Matthew 16:18; Christ purchased the church with his blood, Acts 20:28; the saved are added to the

church, Acts 2:47; and the church is to be glorified through all ages, world without end, Ephesians 3:21.

When we are baptized, we are baptized into Christ, Galatians 3:27, and when we are baptized into Christ we are baptized into his body, 1 Corinthians 12:13.

How can I otherwise conclude but that the church is my most important experience of life and also that as I treat the church so treat I the Christ — the church which is the body of Christ.

T.W. Phillips II
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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:

JOHN K. KNELLER, 4 Glassel Park Road, Longniddry, East Lothian, EH32 0NY
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