

The SCRIPTURE STANDARD

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

Vol. 67 No. 2

FEBRUARY, 2000

ONCE SAVED ALWAYS SAVED?

It's many a long year since I first encountered the "Once saved always saved" doctrine and at that time it did not appear to me to be a very sensible doctrine, much less a scriptural one. Due to present circumstances I am again having to look at the subject and I find that nothing has changed: i.e. the doctrine still appears to be quite unreasonable, as well as being extremely unscriptural, and one wonders how such a teaching could ever find such widespread acceptance . . . For what they are worth, I offer the following comments.

If the doctrine be true, then our copies of the N.T. could be very much slimmer volumes, for much of the epistles seem to be exhortations to Christians not to fall away from the faith. Such exhortations would seem to be very foolish if such a falling away is not possible. I am, however, informed that the validity of the doctrine of "Once saved always saved" had never been challenged until the coming of one Jacobus Arminius, who taught that salvation was conditional, and that even Christians could be lost.

Jacobus Arminius (1560 - 1609) was a theological professor at Leyden, Holland, who opposed the Calvinistic grip in which Holland was held at the time. His opposition to Calvin's doctrine of predestination, and state control of the church, won him many followers, but after the presentation of his "Remonstrance" (1610) to the General Assembly at Dort, his movement lost impetus. If Arminius taught that salvation was conditional (and not predestined) we can only commend him: and if he taught, in the face of strong opposition from the state church, that Christians could perish from their faith we can, again, only admire him.

It is nonsense, however, to suggest that Arminius was the first to suggest that salvation was conditional, or that he was the first to oppose the "once saved always saved" doctrine. God's word has always plainly stated that salvation was very conditional and has always shown clearly the "once saved always saved" doctrine to be foolish and unscriptural. Arminius was obviously merely trying to reinstate N.T. teaching in an environment created by the writings of Calvin.

SHALL NEVER PERISH Etc.

The "once saved always saved" doctrine is based, like many other mistaken ideas in religion, upon a complete misunderstanding of two or three important verses of scripture: one of which is John 10:27,28. "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me, and I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of My hand." This statement by Jesus is probably the "flagship" verse in the justification of the doctrine, especially the phrase "and they shall never perish." This verse is also used to try to show that those who

fall away could never have been Christ's sheep in the first place, for Jesus "knows" His own sheep. However, as we can see, the verse does refer to those who will "Hear My voice," and who will "Follow Me," and so that would seem to make the promise of eternal life *conditional* upon hearing and following Jesus. And so even the "flagship" verse seems to teach *conditional salvation*.

Another "proof text" for the doctrine is Rom. 8:35-39: viz. **"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril or sword . . . For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Jesus Christ our Lord."** Who then can separate us from the love of Christ? Only ourselves. Nothing can separate us from God *but ourselves*. If we can't possibly separate ourselves from God's love, why does Jesus exhort us to **"Abide in God's love"** (John 15:9)? In the self same chapter (v10) Jesus says, **"IF ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love."** This seems to mean that abiding in God's love is *conditional* upon keeping His commandments, and that sounds very like conditional salvation does it not?

Another text often advanced as justification for the "once saved always saved" doctrine is John 5:24: viz. **"Verily, verily I say unto you, he that heareth My word and believeth Him that sent Me hath eternal life, and cometh not into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life."** Once again we notice that even this verse contains *conditions*: viz. **"He that heareth My word and believeth Him that sent Me."** Clearly only those who fulfil these conditions will have eternal life.

Room for one other "Proof text" (although there are others) in 1 John 2:19 viz. **"They went out from us but they were not of us; for if they had been of us they would, no doubt, have continued with us, but they went out that they may be made manifest that they were not all of us."** This verse is used to "prove" that those who fall away were never Christians in the first place (and we shall mention this subject later) but the *previous verse* tells that John was referring specifically to the *antichrist*. The verse (v18) says, **"Little children, it is the last time and so ye have heard that antichrist shall come; even now there are many antichrists whereby we know it is the last time."** And so those who were not of the apostles, and went out from the apostles, were *the antichrists*, and so this verse had a limited application and referred to a set number of individuals.

Other "proof texts" (such as 1 John 3:9; 1 Peter 1:5; 1 Cor. 3:15) could also be mentioned, but we must leave space for the very substantial quantity of scripture which refutes this doctrine. Some examples are in the following section.

WHAT SAITH THE SCRIPTURE?

Space is obviously limited but we shall include as many relevant references as possible.

"Take heed brethren, lest haply there shall be in any one of you an evil heart of unbelief, in falling away from the living God." (Heb. 3:12). We notice Paul was speaking to his *"brethren"* and seems concerned that some might "fall away."

"Ye are severed from Christ, ye who would be justified by the law, ye are fallen away from grace" (Gal.5:4). Paul was again, addressing Christians (in Galatia) and warning them of the possibility that they could fall from grace and be severed from Christ.

"For, through thy knowledge, he that is weak perisheth, the brother for whose sake Christ died" (1 Cor. 8:11). Paul is again concerned about a "brother for whose

sake Christ died" being at risk of perishing.

"Having condemnation because they have cast off their first faith" (1 Tim. 5:12). It appears possible for Christians to "cast off" their first faith.

"So, because thou art lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, I will spue thee out of My mouth" (Rev. 3:16). These words come from the very same lips as "they shall never perish." Yet Jesus warns lukewarm Christians that He will spue them out of His mouth.

"Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him, let him know that he which converteth a sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death and hide a multitude of sins" (James 5:19). Again Paul is speaking of his "brethren" (Christians).

"Now all these things happened unto them (Israel) for ensamples; and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world have come. Wherefore, let him that thinketh he standeth beware lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12). The clear teaching is, that Spiritual Israel could suffer the same fate as the Israel of old.

"Wherefore the rather brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure, for IF ye do these things ye shall never fall" (2 Peter 1:10). Why the need for diligence? If none shall perish how could the election be unsure?

"Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things to draw disciples after them. Therefore watch and remember that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn everyone of you night and day with tears" (Acts 20:30). Paul is here speaking to elders of the church at Ephesus, and one wonders why Paul was warning everyone night and day with the tears. Why tears if "none shall perish."

Paul warns Timothy to "war a good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck. Of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have delivered to Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme" (1 Tim. 1:19). These two brethren could hardly have made shipwreck of a faith they never had in the first place.

"For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment given unto them" (2 Peter 2:20). Obviously Peter is talking about Christians (those who had known the way of righteousness and had escaped the pollutions of the world) who had turned back to the world. He says the latter end of such would be worse than the first. Paul did not know of the doctrine of "once saved always saved" and neither, it seems did Peter.

Peter describes some as . . . "cursed children which have forsaken the right way and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam" (2 Peter 2:15). If they "forsook the right way" they must have been in the right way to start with. The above constitute only a small proportion of the overwhelming quantity of scripture which clearly show that Christians can fall, and can perish.

THE PARABLES

Those who refuse to be moved from John 10:27 (and "they shall never perish") should consider some of the other things Jesus said, especially in His parables, and then reconsider their understanding of "they shall never perish." For instance, in Matt. 25 (the wise and foolish virgins) all were Christians, but five, by sloth, were quite unprepared for the coming of the Bridegroom and "the door was shut." They cried, "Lord open to us" but He answered, "I know you not" Jesus ended by saying "Watch therefore." Slightly different from "None shall perish."

Later in the very same chapter Jesus describes the master who distributed the talents to **"HIS OWN SERVANTS"** and says **"Occupy until I come."** Upon His return the Master said to the slothful, **"Thou wicked and slothful servant"** and ordered that he should lose even what little he had. **"And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness, there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."** This ending, envisaged by Jesus, differs somewhat from the doctrine under discussion.

Even before we reach Matt. 25 (in the latter verses of Chapter 24) we find Jesus saying, **"Who is that faithful and wise servant whom his Lord has made ruler over His household to give them meat in due season. Blessed is that servant whom His Lord, when He cometh, shall find him so doing. But, and if, that evil servant shall say in his heart, my Lord delayeth His coming, and shall begin to smite his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken. The Lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for Him and in an hour he is not aware of. And shall cut him asunder and appoint him a portion with the hypocrites."** We notice Jesus is referring to his **"faithful and wise servants"** and what can happen to them.

In the parable of the vine and the branches Jesus said, **"Every branch IN ME that beareth not fruit; He TAKETH IT AWAY, and every branch which beareth fruit He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit . . . (v6) If a man ABIDE NOT IN ME, he is cast forth as a branch and is withered and men gather them and cast them into the fire."** This warning is for those **"in Christ"** (IN ME) and Jesus says that even such (those **"In Christ"**) can end up in the fire.

In the parable of the sower, the seed is the Gospel; the sower is the Lord; the soil is the human heart. The stony ground represents those who obeyed the gospel but wilted under difficulty; the seed amongst the thorns represented those who obeyed the gospel but became choked with the cares and pleasures of this life.

In the parable of the tares Jesus said, **"As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be at the end of the world. The Son of man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His Kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity. And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth"** (Matt. 13:40). We see that **"at the end of the world"** this purge will take place in **"His Kingdom."**

Obviously other parables could be mentioned to similar effect, as could the latter portion of Matt. 25 where *the separation is made of the sheep and the goats*, but surely these suffice to demonstrate the fallacy of the idea that **"none shall perish."**

NEVER CHRISTIANS IN THE FIRST PLACE?

Paul preached the gospel to all and sundry but his epistles were written only for those who had accepted the gospel and had become Christians: i.e. members of the Lord's Church. Likewise Peter's epistles, and indeed all the epistles, were directed to *Christians*. We must assume that Paul and Peter knew exactly who their brethren were (what a Christian was). Paul described the Corinthians as **"those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints"** (1 Cor. 1:2). The Ephesian Christians he described as **"the faithful in Christ Jesus"** (Eph. 1:1). The Roman Christians he called **"Beloved of God, called to be saints"** (Rom 1:7). The Hebrews he called, **"Holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling"** (Heb. 3:1). Does that sound as if he regarded them as Christians? Peter wrote to **"the elect according to the foreknowledge of God"** (1 Peter 1:2). And **"to them that have obtained like precious faith, with us"** (2 Peter 1:1).

It was to such **"Holy brethren, beloved of God"** that Paul and Peter wrote in the terms illustrated in the verses already quoted: i.e. warning them (with tears) of the possibility and the danger of falling away; erring from the truth; forsaking the right

way; departing from the faith, becoming entangled again with the world and overcome, making shipwreck of their faith. All Christians start at the same starting line in the Christian race, but not all will finish. Indeed Paul was amazed at "how soon" some of the Galatian Christians had been seduced away from the pure gospel to other doctrines and Paul could not have suffered such amazement if the Galatians had not been Christians to start with. Paul's world was awash with false teachers and doctrines, and without a printed copy of the N.T., the brethren would be very vulnerable to all kinds of apostasy.

It seems the very height of foolishness, therefore, to claim that those who fell away were never Christians in the first place. How could they **depart** from a faith they never ever had in the first place? How could they **fall** from a position they never ever occupied? How could they **reject** a commitment they had never made? How could they **forsake** the right way, if they were never in the right way? How indeed? No rational person would even attempt to question it. Demas was as close a companion to Paul as Luke was (see Col. 4:14; Phm. 24 & 2 Tim. 4:10) yet Paul had sadly to say, "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world." **Was Demas a Christian before he turned back into the world?** Even the question is foolish.

But surely the best testimony comes from Paul himself. Was Paul one of the Lord's sheep? Was Paul a Christian "in the first place?" Was Paul a member of the Lord's body? Is the Pope a Catholic? Yet Paul was always aware of the fact that, although he preached to others, he himself had the propensity to make shipwreck of his faith and be a castaway. Using the analogy of the athlete striving to finish the race and claim the prize, he said, "**But I keep under, my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway**" (1 Cor. 9:7). Paul here clearly acknowledges the possibility that, although an apostle of God, having actually conversed with Christ, and working for God under divine patronage and protection, it was still very possible for him, by his behaviour, to make shipwreck of his faith and, like Demas, go back into the world. (And if Paul had gone back into the world, no doubt someone would now be foolish enough to say, "Well, he was never a Christian in the first place"). Plainly, Paul had never heard of the "once saved always saved" doctrine, and if he had, would surely have denounced it as a dangerous nonsense, in the event, Paul, at the end of his days could triumphantly say, "**I have kept the faith**" and *BECAUSE he had kept the faith* (and had not renounced it) there was laid up for him, a crown of righteousness.

Yes, we must **give diligence** to make our calling and election sure. As Jesus said, "**No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of God**" (Luke 9:62). Evidently Jesus had never heard of the doctrine either.

EDITOR.

"IN GOD'S SANCTUARY"

In the seventy-third Psalm we find the writer perplexed over a very common problem - Why do the wicked prosper? The age-old puzzle had almost become an obsession with the Psalmist. In verse seventeen we find him saying "**Until I came into the sanctuary of God then I understood their end.**" The inspired penman was simply saying, I was confused until God's presence pervaded my life. Then the dilemma was solved. I understood more clearly his purposes. Brethren is it not so with us today?

The word sanctuary means literally: 'A structure made holy by God's presence.' Under the law of Moses both the Tabernacle and the Temple qualified as an early sanctuary (Heb. 8:2; 9:1). But today, as Stephen proclaimed in Acts 7:48, "God

dwelleth not in Temples made with hands." Jesus stressed that the place of worship is inconsequential (John 4:23,24). The Lord doesn't abide in a special place; we make a special place for Him in our hearts (1 Peter 3:15). Thus in the Gospel age, Jehovah finds sanctuary in the Christian's life and in the Church (1 Cor. 3 and 6). As members of the royal priesthood we ought to be found in the presence of God at all times. We should never hide from His holy presence as did Adam and Eve. Nor shall we try to sneak away from it as King Saul did at the Witch of Endor's house. It does not strengthen us to warm by the fireside as Peter did, or head in the other direction like Jonah when we could wisely place ourselves in the sanctuary of God. Until we yearn for the divine presence and are found therein like Paul, David and Daniel were, we shall wander aimlessly through life (Phil. 3:8-10; Psa. 42:1; 122:1; 119:164; Dan. 6:10). Let us notice three great lessons from the text of Psa. 73:17.

GOD IS ACCESSIBLE

It is a wonderful thing that He who made the world is not very far from each one of us (Acts 17). We can seek the Lord and find Him even though He is far above us as the heavens are the earth (Isa. 55:6-9). We don't have to get a prayer card and stand in line like Oral Roberts' followers do. We don't have to wait for an audience with our Father as do the Roman Catholics regarding the "Pope." God is accessible now for each one of His children. We can go directly unto Him through Jesus Christ our high priest. One of the most interesting scenes in the Bible is found 1 Kings 18, where Elijah taunts the prophets of Baal who were unable to make contact with their pagan god. In Habakkuk, chapter two, the prophet reminds the heathen that his idols of clay, wood and stone just cannot grant a blessing. He then concludes by saying: **"But Jehovah is in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him."** Let us give thanks that it is even so today. God is accessible.

WE SEE THINGS DIFFERENTLY

The psalmist had a problem. He came into God's sanctuary. He left with a different perspective altogether. Being in the presence of Deity makes a vast difference. In Exodus 32 we see two men - both servants of Jehovah - Moses and Aaron. One has the tables of stone containing God's law; the other has fashioned a golden calf to be used in idolatrous worship. What made the difference in Moses and Aaron? One had been in close communion with God! When our lives are filled with pressing problems and trying circumstances we should avail ourselves of the transforming power of the Lord's presence. Once we have been in a covenant relationship with our Maker and then depart our heart is heavy until restitution has been made. We know, better than anyone else, how difficult it is **"to sing the Lord's song in a strange land"** (Psalms 137:4). In the sanctuary of God our soul is at home and at peace.

BLESSING FROM BEING IN HIS DIVINE PRESENCE

In Isaiah, chapter six, we have a graphic picture of the power of worship unto the Almighty. This period of devotion and homage caused the prophet to place himself at God's disposal. The Lord of Hosts was exalted and Isaiah humbled himself to carry out the will of heaven. This is the purpose of assembly worship today. Man is made better by true, spiritual worship. In the gathering of the saints we gain incentive and inspiration to **'go about doing good'** unto our fellow man. Private worship is also uplifting. In fact, unless we draw nigh unto God when we are all alone our religion is in vain. Verily, our professed adoration is just as good as it causes us to be when no one is watching. If our personal godliness is like the Priest and the Levite in the parable of the Good Samaritan we will be sadly lacking in God's sight. One major reason they **'passed**

by on the other side' because no one was there to applaud - they were not in the mood and besides, their work didn't call for spontaneous sympathy! How about it brethren? When we are all alone with God does our religion have any reality to it? One of the most powerful scenes in the Bible depicts Jesus all alone in the Garden of Gethsemane. There, in the sublime presence of Eternity He was strong enough to humbly say: "**Thy will be done.**" He arose from the soil with strength enough to do the will of the Father. We too can find a blessing from being in the sanctuary of God.

One day we shall be in the actual presence of the Creator. One day we shall know the resplendent glory of His power. May we so live upon the earth in the shadow of divine love that over on the other shore we can pay eternal homage to His name!

J. RAMSAY

DOTH ALREADY WORK!

(2 THESSALONIANS 2:3-12)

New Christians, especially those from other cultures, express amazement at the rifts in Christendom. Also students of church history marvel at how much digression came into the Lord's Church. The Church of England claimed to be re-established upon the teaching and practices of the "early Christian Fathers." They find it hard to accept that those who were so close to the apostles could have misunderstood or misinterpreted the apostles' teaching. They lean heavily upon the "early Christian Fathers" writings for doctrines and practices which have no foundation in the New Testament. Examples are: baby baptism, the hierarchy of the clergy and the distinction between clergy and laity.

The writings of the early Christians do enable us to see how they interpreted scripture. They also illustrate to what extent New Testament principles were maintained and when digressions set in. Take for example how soon one man in each assembly was regarded as the bishop of that assembly and the others as presbyters. About AD 105 *Ignatius*, who was supposed to be "a personal disciple of the apostle John," is on record as having written:- "Do ye, beloved, be careful to be subject to **the bishop and the presbyters and the deacons.** For he that is subject to these is obedient to Christ." and ". . . **your bishop** presides in the place of God, and **your presbyters** in the place of the assembly of the apostles, along with **your deacons.**"

In these, and in many similar statements, in the writings attributed to Ignatius, distinction is made between **bishop** (overseer) and **presbyters** (elders). There is not yet any evidence of the Episcopalian (Church of England) and Roman Catholic system of archbishops or bishops presiding over several churches in a district. But there were congregations with one bishop presiding over several elders. However, a letter written before AD100, by the hand of "Clement of Rome," on behalf of the Church in Rome to the Church in Corinth, indicates that this was not the generally held view in the first century.

Clement of Rome lived from about AD30 to about AD100. Some believe that he is the same Clement mentioned in Philippians 4:3. Western theologians claim he was second "Bishop of Rome" after Peter. However, translators of Clement's letter - Drs. Roberts and Donaldson - state:- "The lists of early Roman bishops are in hopeless confusion, some making Clement the immediate successor of St. Peter, others placing Linus, and still others Linus and Anacletus, between him and the apostle."

THE LETTER TO CORINTH

From this it is obvious that the attempts to foist a pyramid-type hierarchy on the

history of the early Church are entirely fanciful. Clement is not referred to as the bishop of Rome and the following extracts will show that the Church of Corinth did not have one official known as the bishop of the Church in Corinth. It follows that the authors of the letter sent by the Church in Rome to the Church in Corinth did not regard Clement as the bishop of Rome. They would regard Clement as one of several bishops in their congregation, in the same way that they saw the Church in Corinth as having several bishops, all of equal status.

This is a beautifully written letter, kindly urging rebellious members in the Church in Corinth to submit to their elders/bishops. These extracts are taken from volume one of the American reprint of the Edinburgh Edition of "The Ante-Nicene Fathers" edited by Alexander Roberts D.D. and James Donaldson LL.D.

The letter begins:- "The Church of God which sojourns at Rome, to the Church of God sojourning at Corinth, to them that are called and sanctified by the will of God, through our Lord Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, from Almighty God through Jesus Christ, be multiplied."

In the letter, bishops (episcopate) in the Church at Corinth were also called elders (presbyters). The terms were used interchangeably:- "For our sin will not be small, if we eject from the episcopate those who have blamelessly and holily fulfilled its duties. Blessed are those presbyters who . . ."

So all references to presbyters are to bishops, since they are different terms for the same persons.

Previously they had honoured their bishops:- "For ye did all things without respect of persons, and walked in the commandments of God, being obedient to those who had the rule over you, and giving all fitting honour to the presbyters among you."

Note "presbyters" is plural as it is in the remaining two quotations:- "It is disgraceful, beloved, yea, highly disgraceful, and unworthy of your Christian profession, that such a thing should be heard of as that the most steadfast and ancient Church of the Corinthians should, on account of one or two persons, engage in sedition against its presbyters." "Submit yourselves to the presbyters."

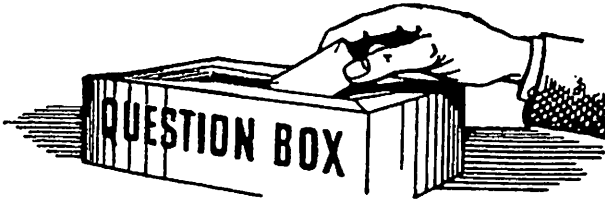
Evidently they had more than one bishop in the congregation at Corinth.

A WARNING

In the New Testament several elders (most likely chosen by the members of the congregation Acts 6:3) were appointed in each assembly. Acts 14:23. The expressions: elder (i.e. presbyter), bishop (i.e. overseer) and pastor (i.e. shepherd), referred to different aspects of their work. (Titus 1:5-7; 1 Peter 5:1-3). There were no chief bishops. The only chief is the Lord Jesus (1 Peter 5:4). Yet, even in the lifetime of the apostle John there was a man who dominated a certain assembly to such an extent that John himself and other faithful brethren were turned away from that congregation. (3 John 9). This tendency of evil men to want to "rule the roost," called the "mystery of iniquity," was at work in the Church - "in the temple of God" - even in the lifetime of the apostle Paul. It eventually culminated in the establishment of the papacy (2 Thessalonians 2:3-12).

Since, even within a generation after the apostles, gross errors arose, even amongst those who are reputed to have known the apostles, it is a warning to us to be diligent to maintain the faith once for all delivered to the saints and to watch ourselves lest we also fail, using the Word of God alone as our guide (Jude 3, 1 Corinthians 10:12).

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Conducted by
Frank Worgan

This month the question we are to consider concerns the subject of divorce.

The brother who sent in the question wonders if, perhaps, we are not sometimes a little too severe with those whose marriages have broken down and who are *'lost to the church,'* because of its attitude towards those involved in divorce.

If I have correctly understood his letter, I think he is suggesting that, as she applies the teaching of the New Testament, the Church is less tolerant than God is shown to be in the Old Testament scriptures. But, I would say at the outset, that we should always be careful to avoid any view, which suggests there are any inconsistencies in the law of God, or that God Himself is anything less than even-handed in His dealings with men and women.

However, since we are limited in the space available in the 'S.S.' and since his comments are rather lengthy, our brother has kindly allowed me to summarise them, and, in essence, here are the points he makes.

DAVID'S DISOBEDIENCE

First, he reminds us that in Acts 13:22, Paul declares that David was described by God, as **"a man after my own heart, who shall fulfil all My will,"** and yet, according to the historical books of the Old Testament, it is clear he had many **'wives and concubines'** 1 Chron. 3:1-9.

There is no doubt that in this matter David sinned, because the law of God, as laid down in Deut 17:17, states that the king **"must not multiply wives for himself, lest his heart be turned away,"** (from God). Yet, again, although he must certainly have been aware of this law, 2 Sam 5:13 records that when he became king, **"David took more wives and concubines from Jerusalem."**

Whilst we cannot justify his conduct, I think it is important to bear in mind that nowhere in the scriptures is David declared to be perfect. Indeed, they do not attempt to hide his imperfections! After the sins be committed against Uriah the Hittite, and, against Bathsheba herself, the last sentence in 2 Sam. 11 reads, **"But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD."**

We must ask, therefore, in what sense may it be said that David **'fulfilled'** all God's will?

Well, Paul's quotation takes us back to 1 Sam. 13, where we read about God's rejection of the disobedient Saul as king of Israel. The 14th verse records what the prophet Samuel said to Saul, and these are the words to which Paul refers in Acts 13:22. They simply mean that in contrast with the disobedient king Saul, the man whom God had chosen to succeed him as Israel's king would be the sort of king whom God desired. In other words, the statement relates only to David's role as king. As God's chosen ruler, and with His help, David would succeed where Saul had failed. This is why later, in the same chapter, at verse 36, Paul was able to say, **"David after he had in his own generation served the counsel of God, fell asleep."**

Clearly, then, Acts 13:22 must not be taken as an unqualified expression of Divine approval of David's entire life and conduct.

WIVES AND CONCUBINES

Consider the matter of David's many wives and concubines - an aspect of his life

which, it seems, was tolerated by God. In looking at this, I suggest that, although we cannot justify it, we should first clarify our understanding of the place that 'Concubinage' occupied in Old Testament society, and recognise that it was a widely accepted practice among many of the nations of that age. There are references to it, in at least nine Old Testament books, beginning as early as the book of Genesis and continuing to the time of Daniel, and it was practised by at least 13 named and prominent Old Testament personalities.

Furthermore, the Hebrew word, *'pilegesh'* has the literal meaning of *'half-wife'* so that a concubine was a woman legally taken in marriage, but occupying a position in the household inferior to that of the first wife.

It has been reliably established that, in those days when to have a male heir was considered of vital importance, there were widely-accepted legal codes - (for instance, the Nuzu laws of the time of Genesis) - which decreed that if a wife was unable to bear a child, she must provide her husband with a serving maid, who would be expected to bear a son in her place.

This is why Abraham accepted Sarah's proposal, and took Hagar her maid *'as a wife'* (Gen. 16: 1-3), who gave birth to Ishmael. And since that same law decreed that a concubine must be regarded as a member of the household and provided for, we find that Abraham objected when Sarah determined to send Hagar and Ishmael away (Gen. 21:9-ff).

When, at the demand of the people, God allowed Israel to have a king it was considered, among the nations of that time, a symbol of royal magnificence and greatness for a king to possess many wives and concubines, and such 'marriages' were frequently arranged as a method of sealing political alliances between kingdoms. Hence, the reference, in 1 Kings 11:3, to Solomon's 700 *'wives, princesses'* and 300 *'concubines.'* Incidentally, these figures are drastically reduced in the Song of Solomon 6:8).

The pity is that David fell in with the spirit of the age, even though he should have known that in so doing he was disobeying God. The fact is, that, although David had many fine qualities, he was capable of serious sin and grave errors of judgment. But what should also be said for him is that when he was made aware of his sins, he repented. Psalm 51 is a prime example of this. Furthermore, we should never forget that he was a man of a dispensation very different from our own, and we should not judge him in the light of the fuller revelation which we possess today in the New Testament.

WHAT ABOUT DIVORCE?

As to the matter of divorce, there is no doubt that it certainly was permitted among God's ancient people, but only for a very specific reason.

Deut. 24:1, states that if, after marriage, a man discovered in his new wife what the A.V. renders, *'some uncleanness'* - (modern versions render this *'some indecency'*) - about which he had no prior knowledge, he could exercise the right to give her a *'certificate of divorce'* and send her away. He would do this in the presence of witnesses, saying three times, *'I divorce thee.'*

But he must have this very serious reason for doing so - and *marital infidelity was not the reason!*

Divorce on the grounds of sexual misconduct is not found in the Old Testament, because, according to the Law, when adultery was committed, both parties to the act were sentenced to death, usually by 'Lapidation' - which is the fancy word for 'Stoning' which was regarded as the severest method of execution. Lev.20:10 lists six offences which were punished by death, and the first on the list is adultery.

MISUSE OF DEUTERONOMY 24:1

Although Deut. 24:1 is quite specific, in the course of time the people ignored the '*uncleanness' stipulation of the law, and seized on the words* 'if she finds no favour in his eyes.'

Husbands began to divorce their wives for the most trivial reasons.

If a man's wife did not cook his food the way he liked it, or even if he saw some other woman whom he found more attractive, he would declare that his poor wife '*found no favour in his eyes,*' and he claimed the right to divorce her.

It was this passage, and what had been made of it, that the Pharisees had in mind when, according to Matt. 19:3, they came to test the Lord Jesus. They asked, '*Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife on any and every ground?*' "

In His reply Jesus reminded them of what their scriptures taught, taking them back to Gen. 2, and quoting verse 24, which reveals that marriage is meant by God to be a life-long union between a man and his wife. This was something that His questioners could not accept and they asked Him why it was that Moses had permitted them to give their wives 'certificates of divorce' and '*put them away*' - i.e. divorce them. The Lord bluntly told them that it was because of '*the hardness of their hearts.*' That phrase means that they were 'unteachable' and had failed to appreciate the sacred nature of marriage. He then proceeded to enunciate the law by which we are to live today.

In contrast with what was permitted in Old Testament times, He said, "*But I say to you whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another, commits adultery.*"

MARRIAGE - FOR LIFE

The abiding nature of the marital relationship is also stressed by Paul in Rom.7:2-3, where he tells us that a married woman is '*bound to her husband*' as long as they both live. Only if he dies, is she free to marry someone else, because only then is she '*discharged from the law concerning her husband,*' Paul even goes so far as to declare that if she leaves him in order to live with another man, '*she will be called an adulteress.*'

We are all aware that our present-day secular society denigrates marriage and has adopted 'easy divorce' because our civil law now permits divorce for very trivial reasons. In such an environment the danger exists that familiarity with the world's life-style may gradually cause Christians to lower their own standards. But the law laid down by the Lord Jesus in Matt.19:9 has never been rescinded or revised, so that it remains the clear teaching of the scriptures that only two conditions dissolve a marriage - marital infidelity and death.

One of the inevitable consequences of failure to uphold and sanctity of marriage has been the disintegration of the family and the disappearance of those family values which make a nation great.

If it is true that, '*as the family goes, so goes the nation*' where is our nation heading?

(Questions to: Frank Worgan, 5 Gryfebank Way,
Houston, Renfrewshire. PA6 7NZ Scotland.)

THE ARM OF THE LORD

An arm is a part of the body that can never be underestimated in life.

The "*ARM of the Lord*" is said in the Bible to have done many mighty works since creation. We are told that "*with a mighty hand and an outstretched ARM,*" God redeemed the Israelites from Egyptian slavery (Deut 5:15). Paul echoed it this way "... *with mighty POWER he led them out of that country* (Acts 13:17). In Psalm 89:13

it is written **"Your ARM is endured with POWER; your hand is strong, your right hand exalted."** Also **". . . his right hand and his holy ARM have worked salvation for him"** (Ps. 98).

The Israelites were aware that the Lord's ARM will bring justice to the nations and that they were to wait in hope for this ARM (Isa. 51:5).

One could rightly say now, that the ARM of the Lord is Jesus Christ; a metaphorical expression. He was with God from the beginning. It was through Him that all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made (Jn. 1:1-3). In 1 Cor. 1:24 it is written **". . . Christ the POWER of God and the wisdom of God."** He revealed Himself in the flesh at the right time (Gal. 4:4). John could not help but to say **"I have seen and testify that this is the Son of God"** (Jn. 1:34).

Although the ARM of the Lord was not short to save, sin has separated the world from Him, and as such lost the glory of God (Isa. 59:1-3; Rom. 3:23). Someone was needed to reconcile the world to God. Isaiah the prophet wrote: **"He saw that there was no one, He was appalled that there was no one to intervene; so His own ARM worked salvation for Him, and His own righteousness sustained Him"** (Isa. 59:16). Where, then, were the so-called saviours and prophets some do follow today? The reason is **"For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all men - the testimony given in its proper time"** (1 Tim. 2:5-6). In addition, **"and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people"** (Matt. 24:11). God reconciled the world unto Himself in Christ (2 Cor. 5:18-19). Jesus is still giving to those who come to Him the power to become the children of God (Jn. 1:12). **Today** is the acceptable time (2 Cor. 6:2; Acts 17:30-31).

The ARM of the Lord is already stretched, but the grace of eternal salvation abounds only for those who accept the gospel call and stand firm to the end (Matt. 24:13).

All quotations are from N.I.V. Emphasis mine.

FRED T. TAMATEY (Evangelist),
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A CAUTIONARY TALE

This is the story about four people, everybody, somebody, anybody and nobody.

It happened that there was an important job to be done and everybody was asked to do it. Anybody could have done it, but nobody did it. Somebody got angry about that because it was everybody's job. Everybody thought anybody could do it but nobody realised that everybody wouldn't do it. Well it ended up with everybody blaming somebody but actually nobody asked anybody. . . .

A confusing story or is it? Perhaps if truthful we can see ourselves in the tale without much searching. Today the Church needs workers more than ever before, not just one but many. It is time to wake up and go: go thoughtfully forward, to seek and search out the lost. It is true that the workers are few, but if we work together and Evangelise outwards, then we become workers good and true. Could it be the case we have been too inward looking these past years. An honest answer might be an emphatic "YES" in some cases. We need to come alive to self, to reality, to the cause. It is up to all of us to make a more concerted effort. Do not just keep the faith, share, spread it, live it o the full. Brethren there is an important task to to be done: go to it. God depends on you.

A. P. SHARPE, Newtongrange.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

March 5	Isaiah 21	Revelation 14
March 12	Exodus 15:1-19	Revelation 15
March 19	Exodus 9:13-35	Revelation 16
March 26	Daniel 7:15-28	Revelation 17

CHAPTER 14

Chapter 14 is a chapter of TRIUMPH. There is the Triumph of the redeemed (1-5); the Triumph of the Gospel (6-7); the Triumph over Babylon the Great (8); the Triumph over Apostasy (9-12); the Triumph of the faithful (13); and the Triumph over All Evil (14-20). One major thing that strikes me about the book of Revelation is that it is a book of encouragement to all saints because it speaks of certain victory in Jesus. D-Day has taken place through His resurrection from the dead and VE-Day is, of course, in the future, but guaranteed to take place.

A *Triumphus* was an interesting event in the Roman world. It consisted of a "solemn procession in which a victorious general entered the city in a chariot drawn by four horses. He was preceded by the captives and spoils taken in war, was followed by his troops, and after passing in state along the Via Sacra, ascended the Capitol to offer sacrifice in the temple of Jupiter" (Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities). I always think about that when I read this chapter in Revelation.

The 144,000 are again mentioned (14:1,3). These represent the first-fruits of the gospel (4). They are pure, chaste and blameless and they sing in praise of God's name. I like the fact that they also follow the Lamb wherever He goes (4). They are a great example unto us.

Babylon the Great is also mentioned (8). To appreciate fully the comment here then I would suggest a study of the first Babylon, as found in the O.T., is so important to a proper understanding of

this Babylon. "On that site took place the confusion of tongues which divided those who before had been one of speech and one family, into various tribes and schisms at variance with each other and of various tongues. The name *Babylon*, a memorial of this event, means *confusion*, and is derived from Babel. 2) Old Babylon persecuted the people of God and destroyed the Temple of God in Jerusalem. 3) It carried the people of God into captivity. 4) It was a mighty, resistless, universal empire. The antitype, the spiritual Babylon, must correspond (B. W. Johnson). I see here a reference to Rome (17-18) in the light of chapters 17 and 18 especially.

Another major thing I get out of the book of Revelation is that God is not only a God of love, but also a God of wrath. As we read through verses 8 to 20 I see clearly the wrath of God in action. I know a lot of folks who do not like to think about this. It does not measure up to their sole picture of a meek and mild Jesus. But Jesus gave serious warnings during His ministry of wrath to come and His comments cannot be overlooked. In fact, to do so is to play into Satan's hands. He wants us to ignore everything about Divine future punishment. Some say: "Ignorance is bliss."

Is it? To ignore deliberately what God has revealed is sin - a small word, but one which always spells disaster.

CHAPTER 15

We are introduced in this chapter to the seven angels, the seven vials or bowls and the seven last plagues (1 & 6-8). We also read of those who "**had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God**" (2). The song they sang brings to mind that recorded in Exodus chapter 15. This was also a song of triumph following a safe crossing of the Red Sea by the children of Israel and their delivery from the Egyptians. No

Egyptian escaped the wrath of God on that occasion (Exodus 14:28). So we have revealed to us here a song of triumph at the Red Sea and a song of triumph at the Sea of Glass.

CHAPTER 16

I see the seven bowls of wrath as the outpourings of the wrath of God upon the Papal power or the Holy Roman Empire. We must not overlook the fact that the Papacy held sway over the Holy Roman Empire during its thousand years of existence.

The first bowl might well have reference to the events in France in the 1790's when the French Revolution resulted in the Reign of Terror. The power of the Papacy certainly weakened at that time and, indeed, has never fully recovered. The second bowl is poured upon the sea (3). Perhaps, this has to do with the decline and fall of the great naval powers of Catholic France, Spain and Portugal. The contents of the third bowl are poured upon **"the rivers and fountains of waters"** (4). There were many people who lived along the rivers and streams of France, Italy and Switzerland, who were regarded as heretics by the Papal power. In my library I have a large tome that deals with this very subject and highlights, for example, the persecution of the Waldensians and the Albigensians. **"The fourth angel poured out his bowl upon the sun . . ."** (8). I see these comments on the fourth bowl as having reference to a series of calamities that befell the Papal power after the French Revolution. I think the work of Napoleon should not be overlooked. "Napoleon had broken the spell of Rome. He taught the world that the power of the Popes might be successfully dared. The terror of Papal bulls, anathemas and interdicts, was then dispelled forever" (B.W. Johnson). The pouring of the fifth bowl (10-11) refers to further severe judgement against the Papacy. Instead of people repenting of their sins, they ended up blaspheming

the name of God (11). The comments on the margin of my Bible sum it all up well: "Correction Despised; Hardness of Heart." The sixth bowl was poured **"upon the great river Euphrates"** (12). Could this have reference to the Turkish Empire? We also read of the dragon, the beast and the false prophet. Could these refer to the Pagan Empire, The Papal Empire and Mohammed? We read of Armageddon, which is a word derived from Megiddo, where many great battles were fought in the past. Armageddon has to do, I believe, with the last great spiritual battle in the war between good and evil. The seventh bowl deals with the final upheaval. Spiritual Babylon, the mother of confusion and rebellion, is seen to collapse.

CHAPTER 17

We read of a great harlot in this chapter. She stands in contrast to the bride of Christ, a pure woman, in this book of Revelation. The harlot sat **"upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of the names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns"** (3). She **"was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls . . ."** (4). **"and upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH"** (5). She was also **"Drunken with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus . . ."** (6). Who is this woman? **"And the woman whom you saw is that great city, which reigns over the kings of the earth"** (18).

We also read: **"The seven heads are seven mountains in which the woman sits"** (9). Rome is built on seven hills. They are called: Palatine, Capitoline, Aventine, Caelian, Equiline, Viminal and Quirinal. The ten horns (a horn is a symbol of power) refer, I believe, to ten powers or kingdoms which sprang out of Rome and supported the false church. Sir Isaac Newton identified them as

follows: 1) Kingdom of the vandals in Spain and Africa; 2) Kingdom of the Visigoths; 3) Kingdom of the Suevi in Spain; 4) Kingdom of the Alans in France; 5) Kingdom of the Burgundians; 6) Kingdom of the Franks; 7) Kingdom of the Britons; 8) Kingdom of the Huns; 9) Kingdom of the Lombards; 10) Kingdom of Ravena.

I refer to the concluding words of verse 4: ". . . having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication" Jeremiah wrote of the first Babylon thus: "Babylon has been a golden cup in the Lord's hand, that made all the earth drunken: the nations have drunk her wine; therefore the nations are mad" (Jeremiah 51:7). The "many waters" (1) are "peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues" (15). It is incredible to think of the influence and power spiritual Babylon had upon so many people. History clearly testifies to that.

IAN S. DAVIDSON,
Motherwell.

TEST YOUR BIBLICAL KNOWLEDGE

1. Who found Moses in the river?
2. How did Elisha heal the waters of Jericho?
3. This king was killed in a battle at Megiddo.
4. Who was Phurah?
5. The people played these instruments at the anointing of Solomon.
6. Whose bones were buried at Shechem?
7. The book of Acts tells us that he was slain by Herod.
8. What was Barnabas's native land?
9. In the book of Revelation, how many were sealed from the tribes of Israel?
10. Give the title of Paul's letter to a companion in Crete.

THANKS

Bill and Eleanor Pirie would like to express sincere thanks to all the brethren for their cards and telephone calls, but especially for their prayers as we have proved once again that the effectual fervent prayers of the righteous availeth much. Bill is almost completely recovered.

BILL PIRIE.

COMING EVENTS

GLENROTHES MEN'S DAY

On MARCH 12th, 2000
Second Coming of Christ

BUCKIE SOCIAL MEETING

D.V. to be held
on SATURDAY, 28th APRIL, 2000
Details Later

TRANENT ANNUAL SOCIAL

11th MARCH
Details Later

GHANA APPEAL

When Lorraine and I were in Ghana in October, we met a number of brothers and sisters in Christ who requested medical aid but we were unable to help them even although we could plainly see their need of assistance. One of the hardest words we sometimes had to say on the trip was "No." There is never enough money to meet the needs. We made no promises, that we could not keep. Now that we have dealt with all the immediate needs, it would be good if we could now help a few who need operations. We know of one operation which has taken place but the Church has not paid for it yet.

At the end of December, our world

spent extravagantly to celebrate the new millennium. Let us remember that we are not of this world and the third world had nothing to celebrate. May we celebrate the new century simply, so that we can help our brethren to simply live. Our Lord loves a cheerful giver.

Please make cheques payable to "Graeme Pearson (Ghana Appeal)" and send to Graeme Pearson, 13 Fairways, Dunfermline, Fife. KY12 0DU. Tel. (01383) 728624.

"THE ENCOURAGER"

A Proposal

Please let me take a moment of your time to introduce a new ministry which I'm sure will be a positive blessing to God's Church here in the UK.

I will be forming and sending a new email list starting on 25 January, 2000 (Lord willing).

The Title, "The Encourager" (Col.2:2).

The purpose, "to promote news, unity & Prayers of the Churches of Christ in Europe, a single simple statement of faith will be included"

The Audience, "anyone with email access"

The Terms, "free to anyone who

requests it for their own email address"

The Content, "any news local, regional or national that I can relay on from reliable sources in the Churches of Christ, primarily within the UK, but also throughout Europe"

If you want to be included to receive this new ministry starting on 25th January, 2000, please write, telephone me or email me as soon as possible. If this is a success, we will seriously consider a royal post version and possibly also a web version.

Jeff Wealand, 138 Eskbank, Skelmersdale, Lancs. WN8 6EF.

Tel: 44 (0)1695 732467.

E-mail: jeff@devout.com.

1. Pharaoh's daughter (Ex. 2:5,6).
2. By putting salt in the spring (2 Kings 2:21).
3. Josiah (2 Kings 23:29).
4. Gideon's servant (Judges 7:10).
5. Pipes (1 Kings 1:40).
6. Joseph's (Joshua 24:32).
7. James (Acts 12:1,2).
8. Cyprus (Acts 4:36).
9. 144,000 (Revelation 7:4).
10. Titus (Titus 1:4,5).

ANSWERS

THE SCRIPTURE STANDARD is published monthly.

PRICE PER COPY— POST PAID FOR ONE YEAR

UNITED KINGDOM.....	£9.00	
OVERSEAS BY SURFACE MAIL.....	£10.00	(\$16.00US or \$20.00Can)
OVERSEAS BY AIR MAIL.....	£14.00	(\$22.00US or \$28.00Can)

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Telephone: (01875) 853212 to whom change of address should be sent.

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"The Scripture Standard" is printed for the publishers by

Lothian Printers, 109 High Street, Dunbar, East Lothian. EH42 1ES Tel: (01368) 863785