

The **SCRIPTURE STANDARD**

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

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AND NOW, THE GOOD NEWS

Prizes on the football pools seem to get bigger all the time. A lady won two and a half million pounds on the football pools yesterday and even the tabloid press denounced the amount as obscene.

Good news and bad news comes to us all, in varying degrees. There are some, however, who seem, for some reason or other, to get more than their fair share of the bad news, and I can never forget the case of our late sister Mary Jones (of Haddington congregation) who had eleven children: most of them reaching adult-hood, but who was pre-deceased by all of them: some dying in very tragic circumstances. Hers was an unusual case, no doubt, but we all get a mixture of bad news and good news, before we shed the mortal coil.

Ideas vary as to what is considered good news, but generally, anything likely to improve our material comfort or welfare is universally welcome. The lady who won £2 million on the football pools the other day, predictably, declared it the best news she had ever had. If we were to stop, at random, people in the street and ask them what they would regard as good news, they would invariably say, "winning the pools". Friends and relatives of Terry Waite, however, might consider his release from the Lebanon much better news than even winning the pools. It all depends upon personal priorities or pressing needs. Trying to convince the world that the gospel of Christ is good news is very difficult. The world's general, if mistaken, impression of the gospel is that it is not good news at all, but fairly bad news. People perceive the gospel of Christ as something likely to place unwelcome restrictions upon their actions and life-style, involving the giving up of such things as smoking, drinking, gambling, dancing, etc. and that can't be good news. They would also consider it too difficult and inconvenient to be "good". "Repentance" would not be a word they would want to hear about: thus they would give the 'good news' of the gospel a miss, and would certainly steer clear of anything that looked like a religious meeting.

If the world at large, and the public in general, perceive the gospel as 'fairly bad news', how and in what sense is the gospel said to be "good news", and how can the gospel be properly portrayed as glad tidings? "Bread in the shops" is considered very good news in Russia just now and they queue for hours to get it, but we rarely see queues in this country to get the Bread of Life.

AN 'OLD ENGLISH' WORD

It may appear strange to some, that the well-known events at Bethlehem of 2,000 years ago can, still today, be described as 'news', rather than history. However, as each succeeding generation hears the gospel for the first time, it must surely constitute 'news', as indeed is any fact of history heard for the first time. The gospel is, however,

more than just interesting news: it is “glad tidings”.

The word “news” appears only once in the entire Bible (in the O.T. at Pro. 25:25) and comes from a word which, elsewhere in the Bible, is always translated ‘tidings’. Patrick Fairbairn in his marvellous ‘Imperial Bible Dictionary’ explains how and why the word ‘gospel’ is used throughout the N.T. with reference to God’s ‘glad tidings’. The Greek word (**Euaggelion**) represented by the word ‘gospel’ signified (in earlier Greek) a **present** given to anyone for bringing good tidings: or, a **sacrifice** offered in thanksgiving for such glad tidings having come — the gods, in the latter case, being regarded as the senders of them. But in later (Hellenistic) Greek it was used for the glad tidings themselves, and in the Septuagint it is commonly rendered “a joyful message.” But if the Greek term means “glad tidings” where did the word “GOSPEL” come from, and why is it universally used?

“Gospel” is apparently the nearest English equivalent of the Greek (**Euaggelion**) and is ‘**Old English**’ (from the Saxon **Gode Spell** i.e. good teachings or tidings) and is applied to the scheme of grace and truth embodied in the message. Later still, the word ‘gospel’ was applied to each of the **first four books** of the N.T. because each gospel writer supplies the facts surrounding the coming of Messiah, and the Christian faith. For these four books the term ‘**gospel**’ was considered more appropriate than ‘**Memoirs**’ (a term used by Justin Martyr) or ‘**lives**’, as used occasionally in ancient times. God’s angel assured the shepherds watching in the fields to “**Fear not, for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.**” When details of glad tidings began to emerge in the years to follow, the full extent of the goodness in the news was gradually recognised. This is particularly true when the gospel is contrasted with the rather sombre tidings brought by John the Baptist, i.e. that of the axe being laid at the root; the winnowing fan; the consuming fire; and “**repent**” or perish.

SOURCE

The gospel was not the product of human genius, nor did it merely evolve from man’s religious instinct. Nor was it invented by the Faith Mission, Church of England or Salvation Army. Indeed the gospel was, in Paul’s day, regarded as foolishness, (as it is similarly regarded today), and certainly the last thing in the world to be regarded as a solution to the world’s problems. The apostle Paul’s experience was that “**the preaching of the cross was to them that perish, foolishness.**” The gospel originated not with some committee of men, but in the vaults of heaven. The **creation** of man was of sufficient importance to warrant the holding of a divine colligation, at which it was decided by all present, “**Let us make man in our own image.**” Now if man’s **creation** received such careful attention from Father, Son and Holy Spirit, consider, if you will, how much care and attention would be paid to his **redemption**. And so Mark (1:1) refers to “**the gospel of Christ**” and Paul (in Rom. 15:16) describes it as “**the gospel of God.**” It is the gospel of God in the sense that **God sent it**. God was the prime mover, for “**God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son . . .**” and, accordingly, sent His gospel into the world. The gospel is described as “the gospel of Christ” because **Christ brought it**. God sent it, and Jesus brought it. It was not an afterthought on God’s part (as is alleged by some) but was preached, long before, unto Abraham (Gal. 3:8) and is, in fact, older than man himself, having been kept secret from the foundation of the world (Matt. 13:35).

PURPOSE

Time would fail us to consider the **purpose** of the gospel, but two broad generalisations may be made. **FIRSTLY**: the gospel was sent to **reconcile man with man**. Properly implemented, the gospel is perfectly capable of uniting former enemies, and of drawing together in a common brotherhood, men of all colours, class, caste and race. The gospel was **for all men**: no longer were the Gentiles to be without Christ,

without hope; aliens from the commonwealth of 'Israel' or strangers from the covenant of promise. Paul explains that the Gentiles were to be **"fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ BY THE GOSPEL"** (Eph. 3:6). Jesus slew the enmity between Jew and Gentile **"for to make in Himself of twain one new man, so making peace"**. The fact that enmity still exists between the nations; the races; the colours and the classes does not mean that the gospel has proved deficient and a failure — it just means that the gospel has not been implemented. Wherever the teachings of Christ are genuinely observed, peace amongst men reigns.

SECONDLY: The gospel was sent to **reconcile man to God**. The glad tidings are indeed the gospel of reconciliation. Paul explains the function of "the word of reconciliation" thus: **"And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us unto Himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given unto us the ministry of reconciliation. To wit that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them: and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God."** (2 Cor. 5:18). "The word of reconciliation" is, of course, the gospel. Thus the gospel reconciles man to man: and man to his Maker.

BAD NEWS AND GOOD

In all probability 'the man in the street' would still be unconvinced that reconciliation to God, or to his fellow-man, constitutes particularly good news. It seems obvious that unless men (and women) experience a spiritual awakening and recognise (possibly for the first time) that they have a soul as well as a body; and that their soul is eternal and will far outlive their body, then it is very unlikely that the gospel "good news" will make any impression upon them. **Unless men are aware of the bad news they are unlikely to be interested in the good news.** The bad news is that we all stand condemned before a righteous God for we have all sinned, and come short of His glory. There is none righteous, no, not one: and the wages of sin is death, eternal death. We cannot save ourselves and so we need help from some outside source. In this kind of context "winning the pools" begins to assume its true perspective. **The good news** is that God so loved the world that He sent a Saviour. The birth of Jesus, (which the world will soon again be 'celebrating') was, in itself, exceedingly good news and was attended by widespread public rejoicing at the **"good tidings of great joy"**, Why?, because **"unto us was born, that day, in the city of David, A SAVIOUR"**. (Luke 2:11). Indeed, Christ's very name was predetermined and He was **"called Jesus, because He shall save His people from their sins."** (Matt. 1:21). About 800 years previously, the prophet Isaiah had predicted that Christ would come, and that He would (1) Preach 'good tidings' to the meek: (2) Bind up the broken-hearted: (3) Proclaim, liberty to the captives: (4) Open the prisons, to them that are bound: (5) Proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord and the Day of the vengeance of God; and (6) Comfort all that mourn. (61:1). Jesus quoted that prophecy in the synagogue, one day, and said, **"This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears"**. (Luke 4:2). Of all the world's great men, men of fame and renown, which of them could ever have described himself as a Saviour and a Deliverer; releasing captives from the powers of darkness; binding up the broken-hearted; opening prisons and comforting all that mourn? Rather the historical record shows that the great men of the world have, by and large, brought death and destruction, misery and cruelty, heart-break and mourning, captivity and suppression. And God's gifts are **absolutely free**: not just for the rich and influential, but for everybody, regardless of colour or creed, rich or poor, clever or simple. And Jesus is not just a Saviour and Deliverer; He is a great many other things as well. He is our Advocate with the Father; He is Counsellor; He is Shepherd; Prophet; Priest (High Priest); King; Redeemer; Mediator and perhaps, best of all, He is a Friend. The unfortunates of this world are ever looking for "A Knight in Shining Armour" but Jesus is a great

deal more than this and can "save us to the uttermost". "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden", said Jesus, "And I will give you rest." Who else could make us such an offer? Jesus exalts all those who obey Him; making them joint-heirs with Himself, and beneficiaries of all God's promises; including everlasting life. Indeed at this very moment, Jesus is preparing "a place" of bliss and beauty for all those who give themselves into His care and keeping. Jesus comforts those that mourn in that, by His resurrection, He conquered death and the grave, and promises a similar victory to all those who place in Him their trust. Surely these brief references to just a few of the many blessings to be found in Christ and His gospel, must constitute "good news" to thoughtful people in any language, and in any age.

WHAT IS REQUIRED OF US?

Many fine distinctions can be drawn with reference to the glad tidings but basically the gospel consists of (1) **Facts to be believed**, and (2) **Commandments to be obeyed**. (For those who, in fact, go on to obey the gospel there are also **responsibilities** but also **great rewards**.)

(1) What, then, are the Facts to be believed? Philip preached "Jesus" to the Ethiopian Eunuch and when, as a result, the eunuch enquired; "**What doth hinder me from being baptised**", Philip replied that he must "**believe with all his heart**" the things concerning Jesus, i.e. His birth, life, death, burial, resurrection, ascension and identity. (Acts 8:35). Thus the first requirement of us is, that we believe, wholeheartedly, all things written about Jesus. (2) The **commandments to be obeyed** are easily understood. To the Jews in Jerusalem, at Pentecost, who heard the gospel and asked what they must do, Peter replied "**Repent and be immersed every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins ...**" (Acts 2:38). Many religious groups treat the gospel like some kind of spiritual blank cheque, and make it mean what they want it to mean, but God's word is very plain on conversion. Besides; the **Acts of the Apostles** describes N.T. conversion in fine detail, with many examples. In every case the pattern is exactly similar: those who heard the gospel and **accepted it**, repented of their past mode of life and were baptised (immersed) for the washing away of the sins of a lifetime. After his immersion, the eunuch, mentioned above, "**went on his way rejoicing**" (Acts 8:39), and clearly regarded the gospel as very good news.

OUR RESPONSE

Obviously the response we make to the gospel is of paramount importance, for it will surely determine our eternal destiny. God has extended His grace to the world and sent His Son as Saviour. What is our response? What is your response? Are we prepared to spurn God's grace, and reject our Saviour? There have always been men who have sought to frustrate God's purpose by burning Bibles and killing preachers, but we can all, in fact, nullify God's purpose by simply turning our deaf ear to the gospel. Every person who hears the gospel must eventually, wittingly or otherwise, make some response to it. Even if we say nothing and quietly walk away we have, in fact, made our response: we have rejected our Saviour; we have said "No" to God's offer of pardon. Yes, ideas vary as to what constitutes good news and life everlasting. Amidst all the bad news in the world: may God grant us the wisdom to recognise His good news when we hear it, and the strength to embrace it.

EDITOR.

GLEANINGS

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

CALLED OUT

"Ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that ye may show forth the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light." (1 Peter 2:9 R.V.)

WE QUOTE F.C. DAY

"Now as the Church bears His name because it is His Church, it must follow He alone has the right to state upon what terms we might enter that select company, for a select company it certainly is. In his letter to the Romans, Paul not only says that we are 'called Jesus Christ's (for you will observe the "to be" is in italics, so that literally it means named Jesus Christ's) but called saints.' Now he certainly was not referring to people who had been dead two hundred and fifty years, the contact of whose body had wrought some miraculous cure or given some mystical sign. No, he was writing to men and women like you and me, frail mortals living amidst sin, but by God's grace overcoming it, rendering unto no man evil for evil but, contrariwise, blessing them that cursed them and praying for those who ill-treated them. Saints, holy, sanctified, set apart. Yes, of course, they had been set apart, for had they not been taken hold of by Jesus Christ, and were they not being builded into that grand structure composed of living stones?"

MINISTRY OF A TRANSFIGURED CHURCH

"When the Church is seen to be His body – His very body: His lips, His eyes, His ears, His hands, His feet, His brain, His heart: His very body – and when the Church repeats, in this her corporate life, the brave and manifold doings of Judea and Galilee, she too shall awe the multitude, and by God's grace she shall convert the pregnat wonder into deep and grateful devotion.

Our times are disturbed, and hopefully and fruitfully disturbed, by vast and stupendous problems. On every side the latch is lifting, and the door of opportunity stands ajar. But we shall fail in our day, as other men have failed in their day, unless by faith and experience we enter into "the fellowship of His sufferings," and become clothed with "the power of His resurrection."

J. H. Jowett.

THE GOOD WAY

"Thus saith the Lord. Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls." (Jer. 6:16).

"Now what did Jeremiah mean when he spoke of the "old paths"? I find no difficulty in answering that question. I feel no doubt that the phrase meant the old paths of faith in which the fathers of Israel had walked for 1300 years, – the paths of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – the paths of Moses, and Joshua and Samuel – the paths of David and Solomon and Hezekiah and Jehoshaphat – the paths in which the rule of life was the Decalogue, and the rule of worship was that elaborate, typical, sacrificial system of which the essence was faith in the coming Redeemer . . ."

"THE OLD PATHS"

But is the principle laid down by Jeremiah a principle which applied to his times alone? Nothing of the kind! I am firmly persuaded that one chief medicine for the spiritual diseases of the nineteenth century is a bold and unhesitating inquiry for "old paths," old doctrines, and the faith of the days that are past.

Error, no doubt, is often very ancient, yet truth is always old. Men's hearts are just what they were 6000 years ago, and need the same remedy. God in that long period has used several dispensations, and each succeeding age has enjoyed more light. But the foundation truths have always been the same, and the way by which sinners have reached heaven has always been one and the same. I say boldly that the age wants nothing new. What it wants is plain, distinct, unflinching teaching about "the old paths." Give me no modern road of man's invention. Show me where patriarchs, and prophets, and Apostles, and Fathers, and Reformers set down their feet, obtained a good report, and made a mark on the world. "The old path is the good way."

J. C. Ryle.

YE ARE? THAT YE MAY

“Ye are ... that ye may show forth the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light.”

“Think of it in our world to-day. We are hearing on every hand, hearing it in most unexpected quarters, that what the world needs is God. The world is waiting for the Word of God. How is the world to hear it? How is the world to find God? “Ye are” – whatever you are – that ye may reveal Him. If only that truth might grip our hearts as no utterance of mine can make it, as no intonation of my voice can accomplish – the Church exists for a purpose, and the purpose is the revealing of the excellencies of God!”

WHO IS SUFFICIENT FOR THESE THINGS?

“Then the next cry comes out of the heart of every individual, and goes up from the consciousness of the Church itself. Who is sufficient for these things? How can the Church fulfil that function? How can the Church be the medium of manifestation, as I have said, the vehicle of vision, the instrument of illumination concerning God? How can it be done? We are told that we must organise. God forbid! The Church is cursed with organisation from end to end! How then? By a realisation, experimental and powerful, of the great facts of what the Church is in herself! Thus we have not only the principle that she exists for a purpose, not only the declaration of the purpose – the revelation of God – but the implication of the secrets of power. This we find in the description of the instrument. The Church is able to fulfil the purpose in the revelation of God because she is what she is.”

Campbell Morgan.

WE QUOTE – J. GRINSTEAD

“For me it is enough to know that a certain position is right; satisfied of that, I must take it and maintain it, whoever does not. My own personal allegiance to Christ and His truth is my first concern. It must ever be so. If, without presumption, I might use a phrase or two of our departed and honoured brother, David King, I would say – It is a great pleasure to me to know that others are standing for the same truth that I am standing for, but if none others were doing so, I should stand all the same. Yes, if I could know that throughout the coming year, not a single soul would be added to our ranks, I should still go forward – in sorrow and with much searching of heart – still I should have no choice but to just go forward proclaiming the same truth, and handling over all responsibility to the Master and to those who heard the truth.”

Leonard Morgan.

THE TIMES OF THE GENTILES

Dear Editor,

I must again beg space to answer your comments on the article, “The Times of the Gentiles” November issue.

These comments are framed as a defence of the theory that Luke 21:32 implies that every prediction in this chapter refers EXCLUSIVELY to the fall of Jerusalem. They are significant, not from what has been said, but from what has not been said. Discerning readers will be aware that the burden of proof rests upon those who hold this theory. They must show how these predictions fit into the historic facts, either literally, or figuratively. It will be noted that no attempt has been made to answer any of the YES or NO questions, or to offer explanations. That the “angels gathering the elect” (Matt. 24:34, Mk. 13:30) must refer to the coming of the Lord and the resurrection of the dead has not been questioned. The absence of a denial is an eloquent admission of the fallacy of this theory. If the phrase refers to the Lord’s coming, it could not occur in that generation. It is to be regretted that the “table”

showing the three parallel passages could not be printed. The essential relationships are presented so that they can be readily appreciated, and what might be a complicated study is simplified. (Anyone wishing to acquire a copy should send a stamped addressed envelope to me at the given address.)

I refer again to your Editorial October, 1991 Para 4, Quote: "Before considering precisely what changes are likely AFTER "The Times of the Gentiles be Fulfilled", we should establish exactly what is meant by the phrase itself. The R.S.V. renders it, "Until the full number of the Gentiles come in" (to the Church.) The former phrase occurs in Luke 21:24, and the latter in Rom. 11:25. You seem to have written the meaning of the one into the other. The quotes from Barnes and Zerr are on Rom. 11:25. There is an element of confusion here, or you have assumed that these passages are synonymous, which they are not. On the latter, E.M. Zerr states that, "... when the times of the Gentiles had been completed, the Jews would again come back to Jerusalem."

Your comment that Luke says NOTHING about the future of Jerusalem after the times of the Gentiles shows that you have failed to appreciate:-

- (1.) The end of the times of the Gentiles indicates that the Gentiles will not govern Jerusalem again. The Jews will be there and in control, when the Lord returns.
- (2.) The Jewish possession of the city is a sign of the Lord's near coming. Consider carefully vs. 27, 28, 29 - 31, 34 -36.

I quote from the Universal Bible Dictionary, (Buckland and Williams), under the heading, "The Later History of Jerusalem": "The Emperor Constantine and his mother, Helena, inaugurated a new era. The sacred sites were investigated, and the Church of the Resurrection was dedicated in the year 336 AD. The Pagan reaction under Julian was marked by an attempt to rebuild the temple. The Jews received the proposal with enthusiasm; but the early stages of the work were attended with PORTENTS DEEMED SUPERNATURAL, and the project was abandoned."

Whether the Jews at this time occupy and govern Jerusalem can be safely judged from all that is happening in the multi-racial conference in Madrid.

John M. Wood,
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Dear Bro. Editor,

"The Times of the Gentiles"
(Luke 21:24 & Rom. 11:25-26)

It is my sincere desire that I might help somewhat in the understanding of these passages.

The Bible clearly teaches that ALL Israel will be saved. However when we look at passages relating to salvation we will be drawn to conclude that it is definitely NOT referring to the fleshly Israelite nation but rather to all those; both Israelites by birth (of the flesh) and Gentiles by birth (of the flesh), who are "born" a-new into the body of Christ. Those who have had their sins taken away by the blood of Christ through their faith and obedience to the gospel, both those who lived and died under the O.T. law and today those under the New Testament of our Lord and Saviour and King, Jesus Christ.

In Rom. 11:26 it says "he will turn away ungodliness from Jacob" there is a clear distinction here between the Israel connected to the Gentiles in vs. 25. Jacob's physical offspring in the flesh (Israel of the flesh) were to have their sins taken away by the shedding of the blood of Jesus, provided that they had been faithful and Heb. ch. 11 lists a few. This was the "covenant" referred to concerning "Jacob's" offspring. How-

ever having their sins taken away places them in the new “spiritual” Israel and, they together will all Gentiles who obey out of faith, become the children of the promise and make up the new Israel, the spiritual kingdom of our Lord.

1st Cor. 10:18 helps to shed some light and give credence to this understanding for it differentiates when it says: “Behold Israel **after the flesh**” – Is it not saying: look at those Israelites who are born Israelites, those who still continue to worship in accordance with the old Mosaic law, as opposed to you Corinthians (both Jews and Gentiles) brethren who have become spiritual Israelites after the promise because of your faith and obedience to the gospel message?

In Ephesians 2:12 – 13 we see this very proposition clearly explained, and most certainly we can understand that it is **NOT** saying that Gentiles were now Israelites “in the flesh”.

Of course **ALL ISRAEL** will be saved, no doubt at all. But let’s realise that we are spiritual citizens of a spiritual, spirit-filled kingdom. If we look at and study the word of God through the eyes of the world we will never understand. 1st Cor. 2:14.

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JOY

The experience of joy is highly sought after, consequently the joy the Christian should seek is the deep spiritual joy that God can give.

In living, we have all experienced the effect of joy in our lives. Even those outwith the Church may experience joy, albeit of no lasting effect.

Words may express joy. In the Hebrew language, I am told, up to ten different words express the word ‘joy.’ One writer states that the Israelites had more words for joy in their language than any other people of their day, yet strange as it may seem, they rarely experienced great joy of lasting consequence. Shunted about, persecuted, they suffered greatly: much brought upon themselves.

The range of feelings related to joy in the Bible is varied. They include gladness, mirth, peace, contentment, good cheer and exuberance. The concept of “shining” and “springing about” are also included.

In study, we find most Bible references refer mainly to joy in the natural sense. The others, however, related to a deeper spiritual joy in the moral and spiritual sense. There are many wonderful spiritual truths to be found. The sincere Christian needs, as the Bereans, “To search the scriptures.”

The Fountain of Joy

Joy, Joy, my heart is full of joy,
Joy, Joy, my heart is full of joy,
My Saviour dear, is ever near,

That’s the reason why my heart is full of joy.

Brethren, can we sing these words sincerely from the heart? If not we are indeed missing out on so much. Jesus is the fountain of joy. He is the source. Let us be like the explorers of old and seek the source of the water of life.

Heaven is a place of joy; the scriptures confirm that it is the “wellspring” of all our rejoicing. The angelic response *to creation* was great joy.

“All the sons of God shouted for joy.” Job 38:7. Heaven’s response *to salvation* was great joy.

“Joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth.” Luke 15:7. The angels sang at the great birth.

“Good tidings of great joy.” Luke 2:10. Joy abounds to all who would seek the Lord Jesus.

In reality, however, our journey through life here on earth may not always be joyful. It may, and no doubt at times, be filled with tension and hardship. However, in faith, we may know that great joy awaits us in heaven.

Jesus stated. “Enter thou into the joy of the Lord.” Mat. 25:21.

From Heaven real joy is the experience of those of the Kingdom. Brethren, we have much to be joyous about.

Fullness of Joy

The fullness of joy comes from being attuned to the presence, power and word of the Lord. Do we follow Jesus? Oh yes, but how far behind in the footsteps. Or is it that we have fallen far behind with blessings few and far between, with joy on the wane. Loss of joy comes through loss of contact with God. This has happened to many. We remember the case of King David. Sin destroyed his happiness and peace, and he cried: “Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation.” Psalm 51:12.

Joy did return through confession, cleansing and forgiveness. Perhaps we need to recall this lesson today. God’s word relates “These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.” John 25:11.

“In thy presence is fullness of joy.” Psalm 16:11.

The Christian who is experiencing joy is that soul who is relying upon His word, who is resting in the confidence of God’s strength.

Fellowship of Joy

There should be a real sense of joy whenever Christians meet. Real joy resides in the community of believers. As I write, my mind relates to the joy of our own annual socials at Newtongrange. The gathering of the saints creates real joy.

“Fulfil ye my joy that ye be likeminded.” Phil. 2:2.

Function of Joy

The practical lesson of scripture is that joy is related to trials, testing and tears. Trouble and joy, it seems, go hand in hand. Seed sown in trouble may end with a harvest of joy.

“My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into various trials.” Jas. 1:2

“They that sow in tears shall reap in joy.” Psalm 126:5

Christian joy is not a fleeting emotion, it is an attitude to life. It is an inner strength and assurance that blessing awaits the individual who seeks aright the Kingdom.

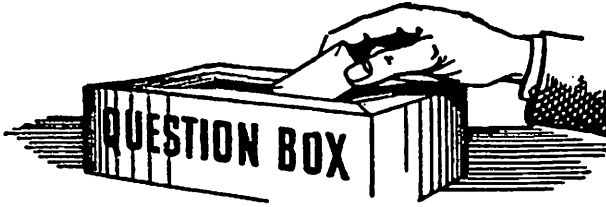
The psalmist of old suggests that weeping endures for a night, but joy comes in the morning. Psalm 30:5. It may be that night refers to this life and morning the new ahead, eternal life in God’s presence.

The function of joy is that we might be built up in faith, assurance, so that we in turn will indeed reach that heavenly home prepared by God himself.

A. P. Sharp, Newtongrange.

TEST OF SPIRITUALITY

1. Do you enjoy praying, or do you merely “say prayers”? Praying is talking to God. We tell God our needs, our sorrows, our joys. We enjoy this if God is real to us.
2. Do you enjoy doing what is right? Sin has never lost its hold upon us until we hate sinning.
3. Are you becoming less critical of other honest people? We are surrounded by those of different opinions. Most of these are honest people. We should give them credit for being honest. We must have convictions and stand for them; in matters of faith we must teach others. But we should do so in a spirit of meekness and be willing to learn from them.



Conducted by
Alf Marsden

“Would you please comment on Paul’s teaching in Romans 13:1-5. How should Christian citizens of so-called ‘evil’ governments react to it?”

This is the basis of a question asked at a ‘Questions Answered’ session in the assembly which I attended. As often happens in situations like that, only part answers can be given, so I am taking this opportunity of giving a more complete answer because of the general importance of the question to all Christians. When we reach the point of considering so-called ‘evil’ governments, we shall need to remember that Nero was the Roman Emperor at that time.

The Context

It would be wrong, as it often is, to treat the verses mentioned in isolation. In the last few verses of Rom 12 Paul reminds his readers of their duties regarding Christian citizenship irrespective of their nationality; the primary thought in their minds must be that they are citizens in the Kingdom of God and His Christ, and this thought should govern their actions.

In 12:17 they, and we, are told that Christians should not render ‘evil for evil’ because that subscribes to the law of retaliation, and this would be in direct opposition to what Jesus had said in the so-called Sermon on the Mount. In an earlier letter to the saints in Thessalonica he had said, “See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men” (1 Thess. 5:15). We should note here that the ‘chasing after good’ should start ‘among yourselves’, and then spread to ‘all men’. The message is that Christians should look for the good in their brethren and, indeed, in all men. This is reinforced in v18 of Rom. 12 where it is said, “live peaceably with all men” (if it is possible). There is an echo here of 2 Cor. 13:11, “Finally, brethren . . . live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you.”

Rom. 12:19 has, I believe, a direct bearing on the question under consideration, “Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord”. If we read this in conjunction with 2 Thess. 1:7-12, we are confronted with a dual application of the wrath of God. Not only will His wrath be exercised against those who do not obey Christ and His Gospel, but evildoers will also be punished here and now by and through whatever agency He chooses. Amid all the exhortations to love, peace, and goodness, God does not exclude the punishment of evildoers, but it must be administered as He chooses. Rom. 12 ends with the instruction to Christians that they should overcome evil with good, for by so doing they engender ‘keen anguish’ in the hearts of their enemies and perhaps lead them to repentance.

The Powers That Be

Rom. 13 begins quite explicitly, “Let every soul (every man) be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God”. You will remember that Jesus claimed a ‘higher power’ when He said that He had the power to forgive sins; some of His hearers were incensed because they considered this to be blasphemy against God. You will also recall that Pilate said to Jesus, “knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee?” Jesus did not deny this, and seemed to suggest that the power vested in Pilate had

been given 'from above'. (John 19:10, 11). Peter also exhorts the Christian to submission 'for the Lord's sake.' (See 1 Peter 2:13-25). The 'powers that be', then, are the existing authorities under which we live. Their power is God-ordained, and if we are found to be resisting that power then we are resisting the ordinance of God. Therefore, when someone says to me, "Ah, but when the demands of the State authority conflicts with the demands of God, the Christian has to obey the **higher** authority, i.e. God, I understand what they are saying, but I have to think very seriously about the issues involved because the 'higher authority', God, has also ordained the **earthly** authority under which I have to live, and to whom I am exhorted to submit. What, then, is the purpose of this teaching? Well, Paul goes on to explain.

The Christian would not want to deny that the punishment of evil has always been God's prerogative. Evil, of course, is personified in evildoers, and it is they who must be punished. Paul tells us that this is accomplished by God delegating authority to Rulers here on earth. It is not the slightest use delegating **authority** to do something without also delegating the necessary **power** to accomplish it; only then can the authority exercising the power be held **accountable** before God. Therefore, he goes on, "rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil". Wilt thou then be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good". It is also significant that Paul says, concerning the ruler, that 'he beareth not the sword in vain'; the sword, of course, was the symbol of authority.

It seems to me that the foregoing comments may be summarised as follows:

- (a) The Christian, no matter how provoked, must not retaliate against anyone perpetrating evil against him; he must not be guilty of taking the law into his own hands, because by so doing he would be meeting evil **with** evil, and that God would not tolerate.
- (b) God has ordained rulers and governments to execute His wrath by punishing evildoers. They have been vested with authority and power in order to accomplish this. Christians must accept this even though they may not **approve** of what rulers and governments do. Paul is stating the **ideal** which is set before such people. As I said at the start, Nero was the Emperor at the time Paul wrote this, and they do not come much worse than he was.
- (c) Paul tells Christians that they must be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. He reinforces the argument by telling the Christians at Rome that this was why they had to pay tribute. The paying of tribute money (or equivalent) was an acknowledgement of the submission of one State to another or for protection and peace. The Greek word used in Rom. 13:6 is PHOROUS and refers to imperial taxes which could only be paid in imperial coin. The paying of such taxes was again a recognition of the authority of the State over its subjects, particularly those of a Protectorate such as Judaea under the Procurator, Pontius Pilate. One could argue that Christians at that time should have withheld that tribute money, but Paul exhorts them not to do this. This teaching also tells Christians of today that we should not withhold such things as Poll Tax payments, etc.

Paul concludes with a general exhortation to all Christians; "Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour. Owe no man anything, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law". What a beautiful spirit Christ and the Holy Spirit can engender, if we will only let them.

What About the State?

We have been considering the punishment of individuals who are evildoers, but what of the **State itself** which is evil? At present we are witnessing momentous events in Eastern Europe. It is now being revealed that Presidents, Ministers and State Administrators of some States have been corrupt and evil in the extreme. Does the

teaching we have been considering cater for revolution by the people in order to remove such repressive and evil regimes, and replace them by better forms of government? Nero, under whose rule Paul was beheaded and Peter crucified, was the atrocious product of an atrocious age, but he was deposed by the people and perished, no doubt with many who aided him. History abounds with examples of leaders who have committed heinous crimes against their subjects until finally overthrown by the people, and I believe that we still see this today. I see nothing in Paul's teaching to forbid this except to say that Christians should not engage themselves in evil deeds in order to depose evil men. It is true to say that the governments of the world have tried, through the old League of Nations and latterly through the United Nations, to curb the evils perpetrated by some States against their own citizens, and against the citizens of other States, but because of the nature of the problem only limited success has been achieved. Nevertheless, a formula for this is still sought, and we can rejoice in that. In the meantime, lawlessness and disorder must not be practised by Christians nor must they take the law into their own hands and try to repay evil with evil, but they must be loving to all, 'for he that loveth another fulfils the law of the Spirit in Christ Jesus'. Leave the punishment to God's ministers on earth.

(All questions, please, to Alf Marsden, 20 Costessy Way,
Winstanley, Wigan, WN3 6ES)

WOULD THEY DO AS WELL?

We are constantly told by those who deny the historicity of many Old Testament narratives that, on the supposition that they are fictitious, their value is not impaired; they still teach the same lessons and with the same force. They are compared to the parable of the prodigal son, which, it is said, has a great value as if it were a true story. They are also compared to a certain class of novels which enforce moral lessons with great power, though they are known to be fictitious. This is a very plausible plea. It is doubtless believed by those who urge it, and it is readily accepted by those who are this way inclined. But is it true?

The comparison involves the assumption that the moral force of a real example and an imaginary one is the same. The moral force of Abraham's example in offering Isaac at the command of God has been felt by all believers in all ages. We are asked to believe that it would have been equally effective had all believers in all ages understood that Abraham never offered Isaac — that the story is a fiction. Let a man preach from that text a sermon intended to arouse his hearers to personal sacrifices in the service of God, closing with the statement that the story is all fiction, and see what effect his sermon will have.

The difference in effect of the two classes of narratives is this: That in moral fiction we are told how men *ought* to act, but in true narrative we are told how they *did* act. The former has the force of precept; the latter, the force of example. The hearer or the reader can parry the force of the former by answering, Oh, that is well enough to talk about, but nobody ever acted in that way, and you must not expect me to do it. But the force of the latter can not be voided, because what one man *has* done another *may* do.

As to novels, dramas, and all such literature, their moral effects are grossly exaggerated. While they often move the feeling very deeply, they seldom show fruit in actual life. The inveterate novel-reader, and the constant attendant on the playhouse, are among the most selfish beings. They learn to indulge in emotion as a luxury, and not as a stimulus to active benevolence. The lady who heard the play of "The Three Orphans," which had a great run a few years ago, and wept profusely in sympathy with the unfortunates, and then, as she started home, spurned from her presence three

real orphans who stood at her carriage door, is a fair representative of the whole class, and a good illustration of the practical value of fiction.

As to the story of the prodigal son, the assumption that it is fiction is without a shadow of foundation. Amid the countless multitude of rich men with two sons, both of whom have acted parts almost identical with those of the parable, it would be strange indeed if none had ever done precisely what the parable narrates. The Lord's parables were realities, and not fictions. No man can prove of a single one of them that it had not actually transpired. There is a double deception, then, when men assert that the narratives of the Old Testament would be just as effective if regarded as fictions, and then appeal to any of the parables as examples in point. As well declare that a picture of a thunderstorm, or an imitation of one by an orchestra, would as thoroughly purify the atmosphere as the storm itself. In an actual event there is the power of an example. In a fictitious narrative there is only the power of a supposed example.

From "Biblical Criticism" by J.W. McGarvey 1898.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Jan. 5	Zechariah 6	Revelation 6
Jan. 12	Ezekiel 9	Revelation 7
Jan. 19	Habakkuk 3	Revelation 8
Jan. 26	Joel 2: 1-18	Revelation 9

THE OPENING OF THE SIX SEALS

When the four seals were opened, John saw four different coloured horses. The first was a **white horse** (6:2) and depicted, I believe, a great age in the history of the Roman Empire, the age of Trajan, or of the Antonines, beginning with the reign of Nerva. B.W. Johnson has written: "1. It began immediately after John wrote. 2. It was a period of prosperity. 3. It was the period of the mightiest extent. 4. It furnished one of the mightiest conquerors of the Roman name. 5. He was a crowned conqueror, and, after he received his crown, went forth to conquer. 6. This fulfilment is within the scope of prophecy, which embraces the Roman Empire." This period was from 96 AD to 192 A.D.

The second, a **red horse** (6:4), is a symbol of carnage. It was used to describe an epoch of civil war, which immediately followed the events of the first seal. Sismondi in his *Fall of the Roman Empire* wrote: "With Commodus commenced the third and most calamitous period. It lasted ninety-two years, from

192 to 284. During that period thirty-two emperors and twenty-seven pretenders alternately hurled each other from the throne by incessant civil warfare." This is what is meant by "they should kill one another" (6:4).

The third, a **black horse** (6:5), is a symbol of mourning caused by distress and oppression. A pair of balances in his hand (6:5) indicated a scarcity of food, the inevitable result of a civil war.

The fourth horse was a **pale horse** (6:8), the colour of death. We read: "**And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword and with hunger and with death and with the beasts of the earth**" (6:8) (We are reminded here of the four sore judgements of God against Jerusalem over six hundred years before (Ezekiel 14:12-21). Gibbon, in writing about the terrible events of the third century A.D., commented: "But a long and general famine was a calamity of a more serious kind. It was the inevitable consequence of rapine and oppression, which extirpated the produce of the present, and the future harvests ... During some time five thousand persons died daily in Rome; and many towns, that had escaped the hands of the Barbarians, were entirely depopulated."

The fifth seal does not reveal a horse but "**under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God and**

for the testimony which they held" (6:9). There were ten great persecutions of the early Christians by the pagan Romans from Nero to Diocletian, who abdicated in 305 A.D. It is impossible to determine the number of martyrs during these centuries, but they must have numbered millions. **The white robes** (6:11) speak of victory, the great theme of the book of Revelation.

The opening of the sixth seal gives a cataclysmic picture. Johnson has written: "We have, then, surely a time of blood, a time of mourning, a time when kings and earthly dignitaries fall and mourn, a time when the kingdoms, signified by mountains and islands, are moved out of their places". In other words, there would be a great revolution in the Empire and the destruction of the old Paganism the result. The wrath of the Lamb was behind it all (6:16). Dear reader, study the history books on the Roman Empire and see the fulfilment of the prophecy for yourself. The times of Constantine should be of special interest.

The Sealing of the Saints

The four winds (7:1) represent the destructive forces upon the Empire and **the four angels** the restraining power of God upon these forces. The latter gave time for Christianity to develop within the Roman world prior to the arrival of the marauding hordes.

We read: "**Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads**" (7:3). Such sealing must refer to an open and real acknowledgement of Christ. The hundred and forty four thousand are mentioned of all the tribes of the children of Israel (7:4). Judah is the first one cited probably because the Messiah came from this tribe. Dan is omitted, and many commentators are of the view that it was because it was the first tribe to fall into idolatry. There are two classes represented here: the Jews and the larger company composed of Gentiles (7:9). It should be remembered that the Jews were the first-fruits of the

gospel (Acts 2).

The Sounding of the Trumpets

The sounding of the trumpets succeeded the opening of **the seventh seal** (8:1). The trumpet is a war-like instrument used to sound the charge of armies. It is a symbol, therefore, of the rush of hosts of war. As we read chapter 7 and 8 we see the agents that arose to destroy the Roman power.

The sounding of **The first angel** depicted the coming of the Goths especially under their great leader Alaric. The "third part" (8:7) refers to the Western empire or the kingdom of the Franks. The Goths were noted for their scorched-earth policy.

The sounding of **the second angel** saw the beginning of the destructive work of the Vandals in the fifth century A.D. Genseric was one of their great kings. The Vandals were a people who built ships and struggled for the mastery of the Mediterranean. One commentator wrote: "Fleets meet in the shock of battle; the sea is reddened with the blood of the slain; the Roman ensign goes down, dyed in blood; the islands of the sea fall into the hands of the fierce barbarian, and at last, near thirty years after the contest began, their fleets land their armies in Italy, and they rush upon Rome"!

The sounding of **the third trumpet** ushered the fierce rush of Attila the Hun, known as the scourge of God, whose forces attacked the rivers. For example, they fought mighty conflicts on the Rhine, the Marne and the Po. An accurate title, therefore, for Attila was "the Wormwood of the Rivers."

When **the fourth angel** sounded, darkness was the effect. John's words speak of the coming of Odoacer, king of the Heruli, a northern race. The events took place in the fifth century A.D. Albert Barnes has written: "If the previous symbols referred to Alaric, to Genseric, and to Attila, there can be no difficulty in applying this to Odoacer and his reign — a reign in which, in fact, the Roman dominion in the West came to

an end and passed into the hands of this barbarian”.

“And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star fall from heaven unto earth: and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit” (9:1). I believe these words speak of Muhammad, the founder in the seventh century A.D. of the world religion known as Islam, Muhammad came from Arabia and the following facts should be noted about the Arabians. They came from the home of the locust (9:3,7). they all fought on horseback (9:9). They wore upon their heads “crowns like gold” (9:7). This is a reference to their turbans. They had “the faces of men” (9:7), or were bearded, and “the hair of woman” (9:8), or had long hair. They had breastplates, “as it were the breastplates of iron” (9:9), which refers to the Arabian iron coats of mail.

The sounding of the trumpet by the sixth angel heralded the attack on the Eastern empire by the Turks. They were the first to use gunpowder in battle (9:17). It was the Turks who brought about the fall of Constantinople in 1453, which ended the Roman Empire. This date is predicted in 9:15. One would have thought that after all these Divine judgements men would have repented of their sins, but they did not (9:20-21).

Ian S. Davidson,
Motherwell.

COMING EVENTS

Kirkcaldy Annual Social
Saturday, 11th April, 1992
at 3.30 p.m.

Speaker: John Mooney

Ruth Moyes, Sec.

GHANA REPORT

In the past month the church in Odumasi have reported that another three souls have been added to Christ's Kingdom. Bill Cook has received requests for Medical Aid and Building

Funds and these have been met from funds in Ghana.

The Odumasi area have received 100 sets of Bible Correspondence courses and they were virtually used before they had the opportunity to advertise them. From the fund in the Bank here, I ordered another 300 sets to be sent direct to Ghana.

Preachers from a few congregations travelled to Aflao on the 21st October to help the new congregation there, some (Bill among them) stayed until the following Monday before returning home, a ten hour journey.

This month I sent a further £930 to Ghana but I left £330 in the account to pay for the 300 sets of Bible Correspondence courses when I am invoiced for them. Since the Appeal began we have collected £26,049.01p.

I receive a lot of letters from Ghana each month from the Brethren who ask me to express their thanks for the generous support you have given them. They ask me to pass on their warmest regards.

This is probably not the right place to insert this paragraph but as it has connections with Ghana I am sure that no-one will mind. On the 27th of December Bill Cook's daughter Ann will marry Brother Martin Price from Wigan, in Ghana. The Odumasi church will host a wedding reception. Ann and Martin will stay in Ghana for about 10 days before returning to set up their home in Wigan. May the Lord bless them as they seek to do His will. Our Sister in Christ will be missed in this part of the country.

Finally, this month's appeal will be for more correspondence courses for Ghana. A set of eight lessons cost about £1. To date only three areas have received these and as they are well received we should be considering sending some to other areas. Please send crossed cheques to: “Graeme Pearson Ghana Appeal” to 13 Fairways, Dunfermline, Fife. KY12 0DU Tel: (0383) 728624.

GETTING WHAT WE DESERVE

Recently I ran across the following statement in some clippings I have accumulated: "Though we can't have everything we want, we should be thankful we don't get what we deserve." All of us tend to dwell on what we do not have more than upon what we do possess. We become envious of the possessions of others. Man's avarice is really a problem. As one man observed, we would all like to have "just a little more money than we could ever spend." We observe others and feel we deserve more simply because they have more, rather than being thankful for what we do have.

Actually, we should probably be thankful we do not get what we deserve, either materially or spiritually. But for the grace of God we could have been born at a different time, in a different culture, and under very different circumstances. We should be thankful for things being as well with us as they are. the next time we start feeling proud and self-sufficient about "our" accomplishments we should think of all the people in the world who have toiled much harder than we have so much less to show for all their efforts. If it were just a matter of reward for effort expended, in all honesty, many of us would have much

less than we now have.

This same attitude should characterize us regarding our spirituality. When we start feeling proud of our spiritual accomplishments we need to remember Paul's words of warning in 1 Corinthians, "*Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.*" But for the grace of God we might be lying somewhere in the gutter of sin.

Let's be thankful for what we have and are. Let's give God the credit he deserves for the rich blessing he has bestowed upon us both materially and spiritually. Let's be glad he has not given to many of us what we deserve!

N. Branson.

The preacher who teaches only a little error is more dangerous to a congregation than one who teaches a great deal of error. A clock that is five minutes slow is more misleading than one that is five hours slow. The doctrine of the devil in the garden of Eden differed from Jehovah's doctrine in only ONE word, 'thou shalt NOT surely die', but. . . would you book him for a meeting? Think about it!!

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