

The SCRIPTURE STANDARD

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

Vol. 59 No. 54

MAY, 1991

WHAT MANNER OF SPIRIT

The cemeteries of Belfast must be the busiest in all the United Kingdom. In addition to the usual quota of funerals expected in that city, the undertakers have to cope with all the sectarian murders and killings, perpetrated on the one hand by the I.R.A., and on the other by the Ulster Volunteer Force (and other versions of the same). Scarcely a week goes by without vast crowds of tearful mourners finding themselves around an open grave witnessing the interment of a murdered loved-one. The latest atrocity involved the cold-blooded shooting, at close range, of two teen-aged girls and a 29-year-old man, randomly killed while working in their mobile shop, selling sweets. The clergyman officiating at the funeral called upon both sides in the conflict (Catholics and Protestants) to "spew out from their midst the men (and women) of violence". When we remember that the carnage has been going on now for some 70 years, the clergyman's hope is a very remote one. A Protestant terrorist group have just admitted that they shot the three young people as a reprisal for the shooting of a Protestant woman a week or two ago. In a few days the I.R.A. will, no doubt, kill some more Protestants as a reprisal for this murder, and the tit-for-tat slaughter will continue ad infinitum.

There appears to be no political solution to this long-standing impasse and each successive generation is weaned, from birth, upon hatred for the other side and we see little toddlers making fire-bombs even before they have the physical strength to throw them. Presumably the I.R.A. believe that if they can be vicious and savage enough in their evil deeds they will so horrify the rest of human society that they will eventually get their own way. Protestant factions, on the other hand, feel that the I.R.A. should not get away, year after year, with an endless catalogue of murders and maimings, and have increasingly been inflicting similar treatment on Catholics. Thus each new murderous outrage on the one side is matched, in due course, by the other.

This spirit of retaliation is not, of course, confined, to Ireland but we see it taking place every day in one country or another, between Israel and the Arabs; between Pakistan and India; in Mozambique, in Beirut; in Soweto; with the Tamil guerrillas in Sri Lanka etc. On a lesser, non-violent and general level, we see the spirit of retaliation in nearly every form of human intercourse; business, social or religious. We hear people say, "He cheated on me, just wait; I'll get him back". "He did the dirty' on me: so I'll do the same to him". "She's been telling lies about me: I'll tell some things about her". "Two can play at that game: I'll get him back".

Indeed, in the competitive business world they have a rather cynical maxim: "let's do it to them before they can do it to us". We have all heard examples of this generally common attitude, and have no doubt, said such things ourselves, more than once. Indeed most parents introduce their offspring into this mentality very early in life; even at the kindergarten stage, and when little Johnny runs up to Mummy complaining that some boy has belted him with a stick, Mummy usually replies, "Well go and belt him back". And so it is hardly surprising that the urge to "get even" is a strong human emotion which affects us all. We see it as **unfair** that one side should behave in a totally anti-social manner and get away with it. Some would even say that the spirit of retaliation is not un-natural, and is in fact quite normal. Others suggest that it is just **human-nature**, not unlike the drive for self-preservation, and "You can't change human nature."

WHAT ELIJAH DID

As we can imagine Jesus encountered this human tendency for reprisals, and I would like us to observe His attitude to it, but first, we must have regard to an incident which involved King Ahaziah and the prophet Elijah (2 Kings Chapter 1).

Historically this event took place just before the 10 Tribes of Israel (Northern Kingdom) were taken away into captivity. Ahaziah, king of Israel, had fallen down through the lattice of a window in his house, and suffered considerable injury. Indeed his injury seemed so severe that it made him wonder if he would ever recover from it, for we find him sending messengers to "consult the oracle" on the matter. Being like nearly all the other kings of Israel, an evil man, he did not bother to consult God, or God's prophet on the question, but sent his messengers to Baalzebub, the god of Ekron (a local idol). God was so displeased by this slight that He sent His angel to instruct the prophet Elijah to intercept the messengers, and to say to them, "Is it because there is not a God in Israel that ye go to enquire of Baalzebub the god of Ekron. Now therefore, thus saith the Lord, Thou shalt not come down from that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die." Elijah did as he was instructed. Naturally the king was amazed at the soon return of the messengers and was even more surprised to hear of their confrontation by Elijah. Upon questioning the messengers and gaining a description of the man who had intercepted them, Ahaziah realised that the man was Elijah (for he wore a distinctive garment of haircloth and a girdle of leather about his loins). A batch of fifty soldiers was dispatched to apprehend Elijah and bring him to the king. Elijah was seated on a hill when approached by the soldiers, and on being commanded in the name of the king to come down and give himself up, Elijah brought fire down from heaven and consumed them all. The king, undeterred, sent another fifty soldiers (and an officer) on an exactly similar mission, and they suffered an exactly similar fate: a consuming fire was again brought down from heaven. A third group of fifty soldiers were dispatched to secure Elijah, but this time the officer pleaded on his knees with Elijah that he and his men might be spared, and that Elijah would come quietly. God's angel interposed again and suggested that Elijah should go with the soldiers and see the king, without fear. All of this made no difference to the outcome of events, for Elijah, when he stood before the king, merely repeated what he had already said to the messengers, i.e. that Ahaziah had greatly erred in ignoring God, and His prophet, by sending for a consultation with the god of Ekron; and that, in any event, he would die of his injuries and not recover. "And so Ahaziah died according to the word of the Lord, which Elijah had spoken." (v. 17). This is the incident to which James and John refer as justification for the spirit of retaliation, in Luke Chap. 9., as follows.

WHAT JESUS SAID

Luke (in 9:51) described how, that "... when the time came for Jesus to be received up, He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem." Jesus was in Galilee at the time,

of course, and as a glance at any Bible map will show, going from Galilee to Jerusalem involved passing through Samaria. No Jew liked to pass through Samaria because of the mutual hostility. The perfect hatred between Jew and Samaritan was deeply rooted historically and was based mainly upon the fact that when the 10 Tribes of Israel were taken into captivity by the Assyrians they were, quite literally, replaced by heathenish men from Babylon, Cuthah, Ava, Hameth and Sepharvaim. **"These were placed in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel; and they possessed Samaria, and dwelt in the cities thereof."** (2 Kings 17:24). Thus the 'Samaritans' could never be Israelites, or true Jews, and were regarded with such utter contempt by the Jews that they could never even be accepted as proselytes to the Jewish faith. In John 4 we read **"that Jesus must needs go through Samaria"** which implies, I think, a certain reluctance.

Apart from anything else, the Jews hated to have to buy food from Samaritans, and the Samaritans only sold it to Jews to exploit them with enhanced prices. On this, His last sojourn in Samaria, Jesus sent His disciples ahead into a village to arrange a stop-over but got a cold reception, and was not received. They would not have Him. **"And when His disciples James and John saw this they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elijah did? But He turned and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them. And they went to another village."** (v. 54). We don't know if all the disciples were equally indignant at the Lord being snubbed by the contemptible Samaritans but certainly James and John (Sons of Thunder) were living up to that description, and insisting that drastic retribution was called for. It must seem to us quite incredible that the twelve disciples, constantly in the presence of the Prince of Peace, hearing His conversations, listening to His preaching, watching His benevolence and compassion, observing His miracles and mighty works, could seriously imagine that Jesus would have given His consent to the bringing down of fire to incinerate the Samaritans. And so Jesus rebuked the Sons of Thunder, saying, **"ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of."** Clearly the spirit of Christ had nothing in common with the spirit of retaliation or reprisal.

SOME LESSONS FOR US

I suppose there are, at least, three lessons to be gleaned from the rebuke from Jesus: there are probably more.

(1). First of all we learn that events of the O.T. are **no guide** as to how we should proceed in the Kingdom of Heaven. These things aforesaid in the O.T. were written for our admonition and our learning, but when James and John tried to justify their proposal but referring to the fact that the great man of God, Elijah, had brought fire down upon his enemies, the justification was not acceptable to Jesus. What Elijah had done may have been appropriate to his day, time and circumstances but was wholly incompatible with the new spirit: the spirit of Christ. Indeed there were many other facets and aspects of the old law, perfectly proper and relevant in O.T. times, which were no longer applicable in the Kingdom of God. In Matt. 5 Jesus announced some examples of the changes when He said, **"Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth; but I say unto you. That ye resist not evil, but whosoever shall smite thee on the right cheek turn to him the other also. And if a man sue thee at law and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also."** Matt. 5 is full of similar changes. The Law had said that a man should love his neighbour and hate his enemy but Jesus taught, **"Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, pray for them that despitefully use you, and persecute you."** Such words certainly kill stone dead any spirit of reprisal or revenge. Thus, the

actions and examples of O.T. worthies are not always to be followed by those in the Kingdom of Heaven.

(2). Christ's rebuff also shows, I think, that nothing should be done in the name of Christ which is itself incompatible with the teaching of Christ. This may seem self-evident but the pages of history abound with examples to the contrary. Opponents of Christianity relish pointing out the multitudes of crimes carried out in its name, failing to realise that what passes for 'christianity' has very often little in common with the teachings of Jesus. Only God Himself can have any idea of the enormity and quantity of human suffering, deprivation, torture and death inflicted by man upon his fellowmen all in the name of God. I suppose the man who operated the rack, tightened the thumb-screws or heated the poker down in the dark dungeons during the Holy Inquisitions (Spanish and elsewhere) fondly imagined that he was "about the Master's business" and was doing God's will. There are no shortages of greatly mistaken men and women who think that they do God's will. Doubtless the chivalry of Europe who crossed the world to the Crusades, "in defence of the Christian faith" and fought the Turks and Saracens thought that they were wielding the sword for Christ. These Crusades lasted about 400 years: long enough for huge stone castles, forts and walls to be built in the deserts, and for great slaughter on both sides: it was a serious business and those involved regarded themselves as soldiers of the Lord. Time would fail to describe similar situations: the slaughter of the Innocents: the deaths of the Christian martyrs; the killing of the Waldensians, and Huguenots; Cardinal Beaton, Cromwell's 'Ironsides' etc. and the men who willingly took life, maimed and tortured in the name of God, and "to His Glory". To many, the words of Christ are appropriate, "ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of." It was Jesus, Himself, who predicted, "Yea the time cometh, when whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service." Even when promoting the aims of Christianity, nothing incompatible with the spirit of Christ must be done, "For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives but to save them."

(3). Human nature can be changed: and must be changed. If the spirit of retaliation is human nature (and it may well be) then human nature must be made subservient to the spirit of Christ. Jesus, in condemning any form of vengeance in any situation, no matter how seemingly justified, was not asking of us something He was not prepared to do Himself: for although subjected to immeasurable provocation He never ever retaliated. This option not to seek revenge was often construed as weakness: but was, of course, a great strength. Even in Ireland many are beginning to see the utter futility of a tit-for-tat philosophy; and are calling for "no retaliation". The perpetrators of these crimes will not go scot-free: but vengeance belongs to God. Solomon's advice was "Say not I will do so to him as he hath done to me: I will render to the man according to his work. Say not I will recompense evil, but wait on the Lord, and He shall save thee." And so, whatever the provocation, whatever the dirty deed done to us, whatever the justification, we must not enter into the tit-for-tat fraternity. We must not repay evil in kind, but in kindness. Paul said, "Recompense no man evil for evil Avenge not yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, Vengeance is mine, I will repay saith the Lord." (Rom. 12:19). "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." (At the time of going to press there have been another eight futile murders in Northern Ireland.)

EDITOR.

GLEANINGS

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

"THE FACE OF JESUS CHRIST"

"The light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." (2 Cor. 4.6.)

"The face of Jesus Christ,' what a subject for meditation! What a transcendent

theme for contemplation ! We cannot think of it without a thrill of loving emotion possessing us. Poets have found in it an inspiration, calling forth their choicest and most sacredly sublime poetical thoughts."

"THE GLORY OF GOD"

"There is something about this face, altogether unique, that does not belong to any other. "The glory of God" is seen in it. This exhibition of the face of Jesus, is put into contrast with the face of Moses, though his face shone out with remarkable splendour – so much so that the children of Israel could not look thereon. But it was a veiled glory, a vanishing glory, a fear-producing glory. Not even the glory of the face of Moses, could properly and adequately reflect "the glory of God." Only he who had been in the very presence of the Almighty, and had actually seen His face, could fully reflect its glory."

"I BESEECH THEE, SHOW ME THY GLORY."

"Moses ardently desired that transforming sight: it is seen in his pathetic prayer – "I beseech thee, show me thy glory." So much of his plea was granted, as to allow him to gaze upon the back - parts of God that were made manifest, but His face was not to be seen. "Thou shalt not look upon my face and live."

"MY LORD AND MY GOD."

"But when a greater than Moses appeared – Jesus, who came forth from the Father, He in His face revealed the "glory of God," not veiled, but unveiled; not a passing, but a permanent glory; not an exhibition of God's glory that alarms, but one that allures and charms. In Christ Jesus we can gaze upon the glory of God and live, and as we gaze upon that lovely face, we exclaim "My Lord and my God." Jesus reflected the glory of the Divine nature. He was the effulgence of God's glory, and the very image of God's substance. He manifested the character and the Divine perfection of God, and all were seen in "His face." ...

"THE MAN OF NAZARETH."

"Who could give a correct picture of Him who is "the chiefest among ten thousand" and "altogether lovely?" It would require all the colours of the rainbow, with the Archangel Gabriel for an artist, and even then perfect justice would not be done to the original. It is infinitely beyond the power of the human and the angelic to produce a picture showing the effulgent glory, the holy determination, the marvellous sympathy, the unfeigned sadness, and the gracious benevolence that beamed forth from the countenance of the Man of Nazareth."

"KNOWLEDGE PRECEDES LOVE."

"In looking, however, upon these word pictures, we shall have something upon which to rely. We can gaze upon them and study them without doubt, and as we look we shall love, wonder, and adore. We propose nothing fanciful, in looking at these pictures, but shall aim at the practical. Knowledge precedes love; the more we know of Jesus the more we shall love Him, the more we shall obey Him, and thus grow up into His likeness, who is our Living Head in all things."

"Every day I look to Jesus' face,
Every day fresh beauty seek to trace,
Waiting to catch the fulness of His grace Every Day
Every day some act of kindness done,
Some little victory for the Master won,
Some whole soul'd word or deed in patience shown Every day."

Bartley Ellis.

Selected by Leonard Morgan.

TRUTH STRANGER THAN FICTION

Often the statement has been made that **truth is stranger than fiction**. Many have found the statement to be valid, especially when the reference is to the love of God for sinners. God's freely offered blessings seem just too good to be true if one is accustomed to thinking at the human level. So difficult is it for many to accept the fact of God's free gift and to believe that God really loves them that they stumble at his wonderful promises.

Jesus, in sending out the twelve, instructed them, **"Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give"** (Matt. 10:8, NEV).

Such instruction may or may not have been easy for the original disciples to follow, but for one who lives in a greedy, grasping, materialistic, self centred society which believes the highest possible human happiness is to be found in the acquiring and accumulating of things to which monetary value can be assigned, this type of direction is most difficult to follow. Because men are selfish and greedy and stingy it is so easy to assume that God must have a like nature.

Even for many who have heard the good news of salvation that is in Jesus Christ and have at least outwardly obeyed God, it seems almost impossible to accept the fact that God wants to give freely. Most people think of God in terms of his wanting something from them or in terms of his wanting to make a swap with them. It is so common to find Christians today who think they can trade God a conduct he desires in return for his salvation. Many in the church today simply cannot accept that **"it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not of works, so that no one can boast"** (Eph. 2:8,9).

This truth that salvation is by grace is stranger than fiction. It seems just too good to be true, and so we reject. Let it be made plain that this writer does not believe that grace is all that is involved in salvation. The plea is not for the rejection of obedience, but for the acceptance of grace.

God is a Giver

As strange as it seems to man, God never deals with men on the basis of their financial worth, or on the basis of their merit. Salvation is not dependent upon how good an individual is. Those who strive to be saved by being good and doing good works need to face reality. They are not good enough nor do they do enough good works to make it. God's salvation and mercy come to us because of his love and grace. Because he loves us, he gives!

The love of God for man is demonstrated in the gift of his Son, Jesus Christ, upon the cross. **"He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all — how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?"** (Rom. 8:32).

Freely Ye Have Received

Yes, truth remains stranger than fiction. Man finds it difficult to deal with the fact that God does not sit behind a counter offering various blessings for sale. Freely given are the blessings God has to dispense to man.

No charge was placed upon his services by the Saviour for what he did. Freely, he came from heaven. Freely he went about doing good and healing the sick. Freely he gave sight to the blind, made the deaf to hear and the lame to walk. No price tag was attached to any of these actions.

As the Lamb of God he went to the cross and suffered unspeakable agony of both body and spirit in order to wash away our sin and allow us to come freely to God. The awfulness of death that sin brings was accepted by the Christ for us. On the third day following his burial he burst forth victorious over death to demonstrate the reality of eternal life promised to those who are God's elect. Freely, we have

received this gift.

Salvation cannot be purchased, but it is available free of charge to those who will respond to God's love. Eternal life is God's gift (Rom. 6:23). It cannot be purchased. It cannot be merited. Only as a gift of God is it received. Likewise has God given the Holy Spirit to those who obey him (Acts 5:32).

What should be the reponse of man to all this giving on the part of God? What does love require then of man?

Freely Give

Only one proper respose can be made to the gracious giving activity of God and his Son. That response is to follow the divine example. Nowhere are our selfishness and lack of faith so clearly revealed as at the time when we have an opportunity to be a giver. Few men, regardless of their professed belief in Jesus, really subscribe to the basic philosophy of the Lord who said, "**It is more blessed to give than to receive**" (Acts 14:35). The usual response of man is to treat this verse as if it were a gimmick to get at our pocket-book. Our devil-inspired pocket-book protection instinct causes us to miss the point completely. The Saviour was not talking about the collection plate, but about a total way of life. He was saying that while there may be a joy, a satisfaction, a thrill that comes to the receiver, there is actually more adventure, joy and satisfaction for the person who lives to be a giver.

The Master Teacher was not using double talk to deceive people. He was speaking from personal experience and deep-seated truth. He came from heaven to be a giver. He lived and laboured to be a giver. He died on the cross and arose from the dead, all for the purpose of giving because of the love in the heart of God.

Because of the way man has been made by his Creator he is happy who interprets success not in terms of what he can get, but in terms of service and help that he can give. One will never find happiness by searching for it. It always eludes the seeker, but attaches itself to the giver.

Freely ye have received, freely give! Let us give God our hearts, our minds, our time, and total allegiance. As strange as it seems, the truth is that only through giving do we really enjoy living.

G.Cook.

FORGIVENESS

Dear Editor,

The Article in the April issue under the title "Forgive" has much to commend it, and the spirit with which it is written is admirable.

There are some aspects of this subject however, which require consideration lest false impressions may be conveyed.

It must not be assumed that one against whom an offence has been committed must forgive irrespective of every other consideration. Jesus said, "**Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, REBUKE him, and IF HE REPENT, forgive him**" Luke 17:3. Forgiveness is therefore conditional. Even God will not forgive, if a sinner does not repent.

The conditional nature of forgiveness is also manifested in the Law of Offences, Matt 18: 15-17. There are three distinct steps to be taken in cases of grievous PERSONAL offences. One who feels that a brother's transgression against him is too great to be overlooked must put the law into effect in the Lord's way. He who deliberately breaks the law of offences brings the condemnation of God upon his own soul. At the end of the day, if an offender refuses to repent and to apologise, "**... if he refuses to hear the church ... let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.**"

The law is given for the protection of the innocent and condemnation of the guilty.

The term "righteous indignation" also requires further consideration. Indignation is a complex emotion of anger mixed with contempt. It is a feeling caused by what in others is unworthy or base. If there was never any cause for a Christian to be angry at the contemptible actions of others, there would be no need for the exhortation to be "... angry, ...and sin not," Eph. 4: 26-27. Now if anger can be justified on occasion, it must be righteous anger. If indignation cannot ever be righteous, we are forbidden ever to be indignant. To suffer injustice without indignation must be akin to stoicism. Mark 3 1-5 records an occasion on which the Lord was indignant. The Pharisees watched to see if He would heal the man with the withered hand on the Sabbath day. When they refused to answer His question as to whether it was lawful to do good on the Sabbath days, "He looked round about on them with ANGER ... being GRIEVED ... for the hardness of their hearts." If that was not righteous anger, one would be hard put to it to say what it was.

In the controversy about circumcision, Acts 15: 1-2, Paul and Barnabus, "had no small dissension and disputation" with the Judaizing teachers. The contention lasted until the matter was taken before the elders and apostles at Jerusalem vs. 4-31. This was not a matter of personal offence, but a case of perversion of the gospel and the arrangements of God for His worship under the New Covenant. The case demonstrates that every true Christian has a duty to align himself on the side of right and those who stand for it, and to be opposed to error and those who propagate that error. Friendship extended to those in error in such cases is a compromise of the truth. We are indebted to Paul in this particular case for his uncompromising stand for the truth of the gospel, without which we would not know what the Lord requires of us in the matter of circumcision and salvation. With forthright candour Paul withstood Peter "to the face" i.e. in public, because he was TO BE BLAMED. Gal 2: 11-16.

Another case which might well be cited in this connection is that of Diotrophes, 3 John 9-11. This man loved to have the pre-eminence in the church, and cast brethren out of the church when they opposed his will. The apostle of love says of him, "Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words; and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church." And then he adds, "Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He ... that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God."

After 1900 years of time, this man stands condemned in the eyes of every true Christian, together with all who act in such a way, with righteousness indignation.

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What is Truth ?, said jesting Pilate: and would not stay for an answer. The truth was facing him.

Bacon.

I would rather wear out, than rust out.

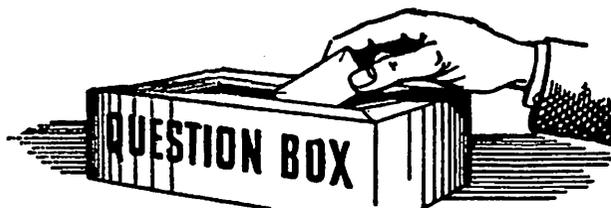
G. Whitefield.

It makes all the difference in the world whether we put truth in the first place, or in the second place.

Whateley.

No one could have drawn a character such as that of Jesus Christ, from all the stores of human learning; from all the resources of human imagination.

A. Campbell.



Conducted by
Alf Marsden

“Some of my friends and neighbours have said that God should not permit so much poverty and suffering in the world. Do you think this is why so many people are rejecting Christianity, and what effect will it have on the Church?”

It seems quite evident to me that media exposure of world situations is having a profound effect on peoples' minds. Wars are now being fought in our lounges. Pictures of unrelieved grief and misery imprint themselves on our minds, and the cries of hapless and helpless victims of war, disease, drought, famine, and racial discrimination assail our ears three or four times a day as news items. Small wonder, perhaps, that the uncommitted are questioning the power – or even the existence – of a Supreme Being whose nature is said to be essentially Good. Just the other day a fellow-Christian said to me, “It would be far better if we did not have so much media coverage”; on the other hand we hear comments such as, “I’m glad that we are now beginning to understand how much suffering there is in the world”. It seems as if one would like to shut out the misery from our cosy little world, while the other sees the knowledge as an opportunity to help. This polarity of perception exists in many aspects of life, but it is particularly disturbing among Christians. It seems to me that those inside and outside of the Church appear to alleviate chronic conditions by applying palliatives. But let us explore the question a little further.

DIVINE INTERVENTION

There is no doubt whatsoever in my mind that God has the power to intervene conclusively in world affairs if He so desired. We can cite the Biblical accounts of the plagues which He wrought against Egypt, the crossing of the Red Sea, the confrontation with the prophets of Baal, and perhaps the greatest intervention in sending His Christ into the world. But we have to ask ourselves the further question, “Does He operate and intervene in the same way now, and what sort of world or personal conditions would determine His willingness to do so”?

Perhaps Jesus Himself furnishes us with some clues. You will recall, of course, that when Peter struck off the ear of the priest’s servant in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus said to him, “**Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?**” (Matt. 26:53). That would have been intervention indeed, but obviously that was not to be the way. The die had been cast. God’s Will was enshrined in Christ, and it had to be fulfilled as planned. In the same chapter, Jesus refers to the poor of that day. The disciples referred to the anointing of Jesus as a waste of money; their idea was that the alabaster box of precious ointment should have been sold and the money given to the poor. However, the reaction of Jesus was not as they expected, for he said, “**Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon me. For ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always.**” (26:10,11). Of course, there are deeper implications in the anointing of Jesus than in His references to the poor, but His answer does seem to indicate the permanence of poverty in the world; that does not mean that attempts should not be made to alleviate that condition, but we shall return to that later. The thrust of our inquiry is to determine whether God should or will remove poverty from the world, and by what means He will accomplish this.

THE CAUSES OF POVERTY

I think we all understand that poverty and riches are relative. A person with, say, two thousand pounds in the bank would be classed as relatively poor when compared with a millionaire, but would be classed as relatively rich when compared with a person who has two thousand pounds in debt. This relative classification becomes important, I believe, when we have to consider people's **expectations** together with their **needs**. But first we must investigate how people become poor, and our investigation will, I think show us that poverty is not always the lack of money. Furthermore, I think it will reveal that the most dedicated social activist, and the most committed Christian, will be forced to acknowledge that the pursuit of equality in material things is, and always was, a pipe-dream.

The first cause of poverty is social deprivation. There are many people in this country, and indeed in countries across the world, who are socially deprived. I served in Africa, India, and Burma, and saw much poverty. The poor breed the poor, until poverty becomes endemic in some sections of the community. These people have no one to lift them out of their situation, and unless the societies of which they are a part make provision for their distress, then they are either forced to beg or to take the most menial of jobs for which the remuneration is a pittance. The question has to be posed; is it right to blame God for their poverty? It was reported in the Press only yesterday that according to the description of poverty as defined by the Western world that Britain now tops the list of European nations as regards the number of poor people.

The second cause – and one which we are increasingly being made aware of – is political oppression. Millions of innocent citizens, because of warring factions within their own countries, are being forced from their homes to wander in inhospitable wastes, without adequate food or shelter. Modern technology can bring such scenes into our homes almost immediately. But the lens of the camera, apart from recording the tragic scenes, always seems to critically focus on God, as if He were to blame for it all.

A third cause, to my mind, is education and training. Socially – minded activists have striven to establish an equality of opportunity, both in education and industry. Education and training have become, broadly speaking vocational, but who then copes with the frustrations of those who may have been educated and trained to do a particular job only to find that there are no jobs available for them to do? Does our class-tiered society really want equality of opportunity, for who then would do the low-paid menial jobs which many people think are below them?

Consequently, everyone seems to shrug off these problems and cry, "Come on, God. Get off that high pedestal of yours, and sort out this mess. After all, you created us, so it's your responsibility". But is it?

IN DEFENCE OF GOD

I use this caption knowing full well that God does not need me, or anyone else for that matter, to defend Him. However, when we have to deal with uninformed or ill-informed people, some explanation is necessary.

Does God know about poverty and oppression? Well, of course He does. The Bible teaches us concerning Jesus, "**For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich**" (2 Cor. 8:9). Poor in this passage means 'poor as a beggar, destitute'. Isaiah also says of Jesus, "**He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.**" (Isa. 53:7). Jesus left the glory and splendour of Heaven and lived in this world as a poor person; more than that, He suffered abuse and finally crucifixion, and He did it all for you and me. Oh yes, God knows about

poverty and oppression.

Has God, then, not made adequate provision for His Creation? I read not long ago that the world's resources would provide an adequate standard of living for four or five times the world's present population. It is a fact, however, that one-fifth of the world's population lack the basic necessities for survival, while a further one-fifth who live in affluence consume approximately four-fifths of the world's income. When tears well up in our eyes as we see the plight of the dispossessed, we ask ourselves, "Well, who is fooling who?"

It would seem that we need reminding of God's way in dealing with this and other associated problems. The Christian way – which, of course, should be God's way – is outlined by Paul in his Galatian letter, "**As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith**" (Gal. 6:10). The 'all men' includes those who are outside the Church. The Christian 'rich' (and we must not forget what we said earlier about relative riches) are to be 'rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate' (read 1 Tim. 6: 17-19). The rich are not exhorted to become poor, but to use their material possessions in a generous manner, and adopt a lifestyle which is simple.

The whole of humanity should heed the cry of Cain to God, which echoes down the ages and besets our ears today, "**Am I my brother's keeper**"? Yes, we are. A note of warning must be struck here, though. Even though we are exhorted to help wherever we can, we are not to condone a 'sponging' attitude. There is no comfort in the scriptures for those who can help themselves, but expect others to keep on providing for them. The scripture is quite explicit on this point, "**If a man will not work, neither shall he eat**"; that is if he can work, of course.

As regards the direct intervention of God to alleviate human distress, I believe the incident of Lazarus and Dives serves as a guide. Dives wanted a supra-natural act; he wanted Lazarus to be sent down to earth to warn his (Dives) brothers about the torments of hell. This evidently was not to be the case, for the answer was, "**They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them**" (Read Luke 16: 19-31). Perhaps the best way that the child of God can help to alleviate the imbalance in this life (in addition, of course, to helping materially when and where he can) is to try to convert people to God through the preaching of the Gospel, and to live its principles. Far be it from me to say that God has never intervened directly in human affairs, nor ever will; that is His prerogative. He never forces salvation on anyone, so perhaps He wants us to solve our own problems.

All questions, please, to
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MORAL & SPIRITUAL ASPECTS OF BAPTISM

(Short Extract from the book, by N. J. Aylesworth. A.M.)

Baptism is God's tall Sentinel Angel, guarding the door of his Kingdom, and protecting the high spiritual sanctities of our holy religion.

Baptism is admirably adapted as a stumbling-block to all those who are unspiritual and lacking in loyalty to God; that is a revealer of men's hearts; that this self-revelation furnishes a powerful motive to repentance; and that, by turning back the unspiritual, it becomes a winnowing-fan, safe-guarding the spirituality of the Church.

Baptism is displeasing to many. It has had a stormy history, and is still bending under a shower of adverse criticism. To many, this may seem sufficient proof that there is something wrong with it; but they forget that it is of the very nature of a stumbling-block that it should be "spoken against", and this is one of the highest marks of its excellency and efficiency. Men never like that which causes them to stumble, and if baptism were not liked, it would be worthless as a test-act. When an amiable worldlying who thinks that he is living a worthy righteousness finds in his heart a "no" to baptism, and he is told that it is a "mere outward act," a mere physical affair having no important relation to his conversion, and that it is a "non-essential", — that it has nothing to do with his salvation, — they utterly ruin it as a test-act. The man takes no alarm at his aversion to it, and concludes that it is not his heart that is wrong, but baptism. The search-light that the gospel was carrying into that man's heart was put out; it has slain the angel that was coming to his rescue. Woe to those who put out lights in this dark world! Let such take care lest they be found fighting against God.

Baptism is an act of expression and a new born love of a true penitent craves such an act. A preacher once asked a sympathetic audience how many desired to live the Christian Life. Nearly everyone responded affirmatively. The same day he gave the gospel invitation to attest that desire by a solemn act of professing before Heaven and Earth, and not one responded, though the views of most of the audience accorded with those of the preacher. Here was the stumbling-block. Here was the difference between baptism and cheap words. Many of the half-hearted who would be ready to declare a purpose to serve God, would hesitate at an awful act of solemnity speaking the loud eloquence of a profound repentance. But baptism is designed to keep out the half-hearted. Such are not wanted. Beware how you meddle with God's stumbling-blocks.

Baptism for remission of sins means man's highest, holiest surrender for remission of sins the last step to be taken for entrance through "the door". Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No man cometh unto the Father but by me."

Christ says in John 3:5 "**Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God.**" In Acts 2:38 it is said that repentance and baptism are "**unto remission of sins,**" and in Acts 22:16, under the figure of a washing, that baptism takes away sins; in Titus 3:5 that we are saved by the "**washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit;**" and in 1 Peter 3:21, that baptism "saves" us. We are said to be "**baptised into Christ**" (Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:3), and in baptism, to "**put on Christ**" (Gal.3:27); and we are told that through faith we become "**Sons of God**" when we are "**baptised into Christ**" (Gal, 3:26,27). In Rom. 6:3-6 we are taught that in baptism we put off the old life and enter upon the new; and in Acts 2:38 baptism is said to be a condition of the reception of the Holy Spirit. Other passages might be mentioned, but the list need not be extended.

Baptism is an act of spiritual overflow, a rushing together of two personalities. The penitent is Baptised into Christ and His Spirit comes into the soul and bestows the assurance of sonship and remission. A togetherness is reached more intimate than that of any human relation. We in Him and He in us. An answer to the new-born hunger in the soul. To take baptism out of its proper place is to deprive the heart of the answer to a felt need, and render the ordinance in large part useless, transforming it into an empty formality. When the father saw the returning Prodigal afar off, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him, had the embrace and the kiss been denied in the greeting, the deprivation would have been painful. The greeting would have but mocked his feelings and, in its coldness, been false to the situation. If then, the embrace and passionate kiss had come six months later, it would have been little better than an empty formality, equally repellent to both parties.

What a pity that this Holy Trysting place of the Soul with Christ should become the battle-field of centuries. When shall this word become again one of the most beautiful in the language.

Baptism is a condition of the Divine acceptance and the remission of sins.

This Act of Profession is the consummation of God's plan of Salvation.

(Sent in by Sister Bethia Davidson, Dennyloanhead)

SCRIPTURE READINGS

June 2	Isa. 63:7-19	Luke 13:22-14:6
June 9	Prov. 25:1-22	Luke 14:7-35
June 16	2 Sam. 18:9-33	Luke 15
June 23	1 Kings 3:1-15	Luke 16:1-18
June 30	Deut. 15:1-18	Luke 16:19-31

LAMENT OVER JERUSALEM

Jerusalem was at one time a Jebusite city. It was captured in the days of David and indeed became known as the City of David, for David made it his headquarters and the capital of his kingdom. Later it was also to become the spiritual centre of the united nation. F.F. Bruce has written: "The recognition of Jerusalem as a holy city by three world faiths is to be traced back to its capture by David in the seventh year of his reign. Nor must we overlook the extraordinary way in which the names of Zion and Jerusalem have entered into religious terminology of Christianity, as symbols of the church both militant and triumphant and of the heavenly abode of the people of God."

Jesus wept over the city. It had in the past killed the prophets of God and would now crucify the greatest prophet of all. Jesus said: "**Behold your house is left unto you desolate**" (13:35) — a prediction of the destruction of the temple. Alexander Campbell once said: "Beside the predictions uttered by the Saviour concerning His own demise and all the circumstances attendant upon it, He foretold one event of such notoriety. This was the destruction of Jerusalem, the Temple, and the dispersion of the nation with all the tremendous adjuncts of this national catastrophe ... No prediction was more minute or more cir-

cumstantial than this one, and none could be more literal or direct."

Flavius Josephus, the eminent Jewish historian, later detailed the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple by the Romans in A.D. 70. Jerusalem has never been the same since.

PARABLE OF THE GREAT SUPPER

The Jews in gospel times looked forward to the great Messianic banquet. Feasts were quite common in that day. To accept an invitation beforehand and refuse it when the day came was a grave insult. The Jews tragically rejected God's invitation and their excuses were an insult to Him. In consequence, others were invited. Albert Barnes wrote: "Those first invited were the rich, who dwelt at ease in their own houses. By these the Jews were intended; by those who were in the streets, the Gentiles. Our Lord delivered this parable to show the Jews that the Gentiles would be called into the kingdom of God. They despised the Gentiles and considered them cast out and worthless, as they did those who were in the lanes of the city."

COUNTING THE COST

Jesus spoke of the cost in being His disciple (14:25-33). The term "**hate**" in verse 26 has caused a lot of comment. Actually, the word in the original Greek means "**to love less**", Clement Rogers has written: "Surely it is quite clear what he meant. If a man is a Christian he must be prepared to pay the price. He must put his duty to Christ before even his duties to his parents. He may have even to go against their wishes. Life is a very complex affair and different duties often clash. That is what He meant, surely. Obviously He did not mean that a man must bear ill-will to his parents. His own example shows that. Almost His last act

on the cross was to care for His mother.”

Discipleship means discipline, self-denial and self-sacrifice. The Christian is not his own man, but God’s man. In the final analysis he has no will of his own; he has no time of his own; he has no possessions of his own; he is the possession body and soul of Jesus Christ.

The wonderful thing about all this is that Jesus does not leave the Christian helpless and alone in his endeavours to serve and follow Him. He gave His disciples the promise of the Holy Spirit, whom He described as another Comforter (John 14:16). I believe that this promise was for all disciples for all time. So those in Christ have the Holy Spirit dwelling in them to help, strengthen and encourage them on this pilgrimage on earth. Indeed, without Him it would be impossible; with Him all things are possible.

THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON

This is one of the best known parables of Jesus. It has an alternative title — “The Parable of the Loving Father.” I prefer this title because Jesus here was teaching a lesson to the Pharisees and scribes, who had “murmured, saying, this man receives sinners and eats with them” (15:2).

The son who remained at home showed anger at the return of his prodigal brother and subsequent treatment. He said to his father, “**Lo these many years do I serve you, neither transgressed I at any time your commandment: and yet you never gave me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: but as this your son has come, who has devoured your living with harlots, you have killed for him the fatted calf**” (15:29,30). In response the father said: “**Son, you are ever with me and all that I have is yours. It was meet that we should make merry and be glad: for this your brother was dead and is alive again; and was lost and is found**” (15:31,32). T. Howard Marshall has written: “One can be lost even at home. The discovery of the lost and

the resurrection of the dead were occasions for joy. One question is left unanswered: did the elder brother eventually join in the celebration and accept his brother back as a member of the family? The omission is deliberate. For the older brother represents the Pharisees and their spiritual kin, and the parable is an appeal to them to receive the outcasts. Jesus was waiting for their verdict.”

THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS

Is this story a parable? I think not. The definition of a parable is “an earthly story with a heavenly meaning.” This is more than an earthly story. E. M. Zerr wrote: “I do not deny this story being a parable on the ground that it says a **certain rich man**. The word **certain** is used elsewhere where we know a parable is being spoken of (chapter 20:9). A parable requires a comparison while there is none in this case, not even words that necessarily have to be taken figuratively. Furthermore, there are so many facts of a circumstantial nature that it shows Jesus had some particular case in mind. It was literal fact that rich men lived in such luxuries as are described of this one.”

One thing that strikes me about this story is that there was a great gulf between the rich man and Lazarus on earth and a great gulf fixed between them in death (16:26). However, the tables were turned when they reached Hades. (Please note that “hell” in verse 23 is a translation of the Greek term Hades — the destiny for departed souls).

One commentator has pointed out that for the wicked in Hades there is an improvement with eyesight (16:23) and a concern for missionary work (16:27,28). But what must be emphasised is this: the rich man was in a state of torment (16:24,28). He was suffering because of his overall sinfulness, which included neglect of mercy and friendliness.

Lazarus was in Abraham's bosom (16:22). I take it that Abraham's bosom is synonymous with paradise into which Jesus and the thief entered on death (Luke 23:43). These terms speak of a state of bliss.

Ian S. Davidson,
Motherwell.

NEWS FROM THE CHURCHES

Kentish Town, London. The church at Kentish Town is pleased to report that Julia Cambridge and her brother-in-law were baptised into Christ on the afternoon of February, 3rd, 1991. Later in the evening Simon Clarkson also decided to accept Christ as his Saviour. We pray that they will find much joy in their new relationship and may be an example to those they knew.

Dorothy Proud (Sec.)

OBITUARY

Hindley, Wigan: We regret to report the passing of Sister Evelyn Kemp, the wife of our esteemed, and much loved brother in the Lord, Tom Kemp.

On March 3rd, 1991, the "Thought For The Week" reached its '1000' issue, and I heard that some brethren wanted to celebrate the occasion. At first I was against this, making the point more than once that there were many other brethren who had done work for the church here, over the years. One of those was Sister Evelyn Kemp. Her loyalty to the church and to her Lord was clearly manifested even on the day she died: March 17th, aged 73 years. In the morning, although very poorly, she was around the table of the Lord, remembering her Saviour.

Looking at the attendance register from 1967 to 1991 I pay tribute to her marvellous record of consistency around the Lord's Table, and may I, on behalf of all the brethren, express our gratitude for the help Evelyn gave to our brother Tom, when he decided to do full-time evangelistic work in 1946. We commend Tom, and the family, to the God of all comfort, and to the Lord Jesus Christ, fully knowing that He who wept at Bethany can share our sufferings.

Leonard Morgan.

Easthouses: The church here regrets to report the passing of brother George Kerr, on 11th April, 1991, after a long illness and over four years hospitalisation.

A Funeral Service was held in the Meeting-place and at Seafeld Crematorium on 17th April. We commend all the family and relatives to the care of our Heavenly Father.

M. Finlay (Sec.).

THANKS

On behalf of myself and all the family, I would like to express grateful thanks to all those who sent letters and cards of sympathy to us at this our sad loss of a loving wife, mother, grandmother and friend. These expressions of love and sympathy helped greatly to alleviate the heavy burden and lightened the load we are called upon to bear. At this time we are conscious of the nearness of the Lord and His People.

Tom Kemp.

GHANA REPORT & APPEAL

I have now received eight letters from Brother Bill Cook since he arrived in Ghana. A better picture of the work is now emerging.

Briefly the news from Ghana is as follows:—

Last year I received two separate donations for the school fees of a young Brother in Ghana. This Brother is working well, and growing spiritually and serving the church.

Accra have used up their allocation of funds for building on the purchase of land and the making of enough concrete blocks to build the outer walls of the meeting-place. Building has not yet begun but Bill informs me that the site is in a quiet residential district of the capital.

Bill has enquired into the use of the money sent to date, to ensure that it has been received and distributed as requested. To date Bill has travelled around Kumasi, Odumasi, Patriensa and Accra and the brethren have been very open about their book-keeping. One congregation did not receive their allocation as they were sadly reverting into the doctrine of Pentecostalism from which they so recently came. Please remember the church at Nyakrom in your prayers, that they may see the error of their ways before it is too late. I am sure Bill will keep us informed of the situation.

Obviously Bill has many congregations yet to visit which will be dependant on his permitted stay in the country. Travel is not easy and Kumasi, where Bill is living, is 147 miles from Accra to the north west. Takoradi is 114 miles west of Accra and 132 miles south of Kumasi. The congregations which are currently building do not seem, to be able to complete their work through lack of funds. I have written to Bill to obtain an assessment for completion.

To date £18,996.19 has been collected for Ghana through donations from the readers of the *Scripture Standard*. There is £391.81 in the bank as I write (5/4/91). £195 of this is specifically for medical aid and the balance for general use in Ghana.

In light of the news from Ghana I would appeal this month for help in completion of church buildings. Donations should be made out to "Graeme Pearson Ghana Appeal" and sent to 13 Fairways, Dunfermline, Fife. KY12 0DU. Tel. 0383 728624.

(P.S. Thanks for anonymous £50 dated 8th April - received 11/4/91).

**LATE NEWS
FROM BILL COOK, GHANA**

In August 1990 another congregation was established in a village 40 miles north east of Takoradi and 100 west of Accra in the Central Region. The village has a population of 2,000 and is called SEKYERE HEMAN. They have 19 members. The church in Accra assist them once a month and Kodwo Mensah from Takoradi also assists once a month.

There have been four baptisms in Accra in the past month, husband and wife Brother and Sister Ansah, Seth Mireku and Michael Abrokwa.

At Nobuwam, Bill witnessed four souls being added to the Lord's Kingdom. The last time Bill and Ann were in Ghana the church at Angu had 8 members, now it has 13. Asuansi had 13 members, now it has 19.

Brethren let us remember the brethren in Ghana in our daily prayers.

Graeme Pearson.

"Talk about the questions of the time: there is but one question — How to bring the truths of God's Word into vital contact with the minds and hearts of all classes of people."

William E. Gladstone.

Education can polish men, but only Christ's shed blood can cleanse them.

It is better to fail in the struggle for a cause which will finally triumph, than to succeed in a cause which will ultimately fail.

Unbelief is not due to lack of evidence, but to a rebellious heart.

THE SCRIPTURE STANDARD is published monthly.

PRICE PER YEAR — POST PAID BY SURFACE MAIL

UNITED KINGDOM and COMMONWEALTH	£ 6.00
CANADA & U.S.A.	\$10.00

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

DISTRIBUTION AGENT & TREASURER:

JOHN K. KNELLER, 4 Glassel Park Road, Longniddry, East Lothian, EH32 0NY
Telephone: Longniddry (0875) 53212 to whom change of address should be sent.

EDITOR: JAMES R. GARDINER, 87 Main Street, Pathhead, Midlothian,
Scotland EH37 5PT. Telephone: Ford 320 527

"The Scripture Standard" is printed for the publishers by
Lothian Printers, 109 High Street, Dunbar, East Lothian. Tel: (0368) 63785