

Dorothy

The SCRIPTURE STANDARD

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

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TEXTS SPIRITISTS USE TO PROVE REINCARNATION

Bible texts misused to support Spiritist ideas include Nicodemus' visit to Jesus, the transfiguration scene, Jesus' explanation that John the Baptist was Elijah returned and Saul's visit to the woman of Endor. Examination of each case should be instructive. Each could be used against the background of 2 Thessalonians 2:10, 11 and Isaiah 66:3, 4.

1. *Nicodemus visits Jesus* (John 3:1-5). One of the passages most used by Spiritists, in an effort to prove reincarnation, is Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus. The Bible says:

Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit . . ." (John 3:3-6).

Notice, however, that these verses speak of a new birth, not a reincarnation. It is a birth which involves two elements, water and the Spirit. How is man's spirit born of water? How is it born of the Spirit?

Jesus speaks of the conversion of man's soul to His gospel, not of reincarnation of his spirit. Nicodemus struggled with the absurdity of returning to his mother's womb to be born again. Jesus explained that this new birth was not of the flesh but the spirit, that it not only involved the Spirit but also water. Jesus spoke on a much higher plane; He spoke of the instantaneous transformation of the human spirit, a change so radical as to be called a birth.

2. *Three disciples see Jesus transfigured* (Matthew 17:1-8). Barbanell sees this event as the Bible's superb example of a seance. He describes the environment of the mountain on which it took place as one where the pure air and stillness were ideal conditions for psychic manifestations.

Barbanell comments on the words that as Jesus prayed "the appearance of his countenance was altered, and his raiment became dazzling white" (Luke 9:29). He says that such a transfiguration is not an uncommon psychic phenomenon. He testified to having seen faces of mediums transfigured by ectoplasm built over them until the features of the deceased, with whom the medium was in contact became clearly recognizable.

In the words, "his garments became glistening, intensely white" (Mark 9:3), he finds a perfect description of ectoplasmic robing. As a Spiritist, he interprets the fact that Peter, James and John "were heavy with sleep" (Luke 9:32) as evidence that they were in a trance. He says they awoke (the Bible says, "heavy with sleep but kept awake"—Luke 9:32) to find Jesus communicating with men who had been dead for centuries—Moses and Elijah.

Concerning Peter's suggestion that they build three booths—one for Jesus, one for Moses and one for Elijah—Barbanell is not hesitant to suggest that word *booth* could easily be translated *cabinet*. In Barbanell's mind, Peter doubtless thought of the possibility of other materialization seances on this same mountain.

"This seance provides the perfect answer to those who assert that psychic phenomena are condemned in the Bible. In support of their belief they usually quote texts said to have been uttered by Moses. If these texts are, as they suggest, condemnations of psychic phenomena, then Moses defied his own prohibitions when he materialized, with Elijah, to Jesus."

3. *Jesus says John is Elijah* (Matthew 17:9-13). Spiritists use this passage to prove that John the Baptist was Elijah reincarnated. This is not what the passage teaches, however.

John the Baptist was indeed Elijah, but in a prophetic sense; that is, they had missions and characteristics that were similar. This had already been established by the question, "Are you Elijah?" (John 1:21), asked by the priests and Levites sent by leaders of the Jews from Jerusalem. To this question he had replied, literally, that he was not.

There are also problems for the Spiritists in this comparison. First, if Elijah was reincarnated, how is it that they explain the fact that he never *disincarnated*? He is one of the two men mentioned in the Bible who were taken by God without seeing death (2 Kings 2:11). He was taken up bodily—still encarnated, to use Spiritist terminology.

Secondly, these three apostles knew John the Baptist. They recognized one of the men in the transfiguration scene as Elijah. They did not link him with John the Baptist until after their question about Elijah's return. Only after Jesus forced upon them the prophetic sense did they make the association at all.

4. *Saul visits the woman of Endor* (1 Samuel 28:3-20). This scene is perhaps the most familiar of all cases of consulting with the dead. Leading Bible scholars are not in agreement as to the real import of this chapter.

Some feel that Samuel's appearance to Saul was only in the woman's mind. To prove this, they cite verse 12 ("When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out with a loud voice . . ."). They say that Saul didn't see Samuel but that the woman was simply deceiving Saul.

Further evidence for the view that the woman was deceiving Saul is given by citing verse 14 ("He said to her, 'What is his appearance?' And she said, 'An old man is coming up; and he is wrapped in a robe.' And Saul knew that it was Samuel and he . . . did obeisance"). The objection is further made that God would not do something that He himself had forbidden.

This writer believes that Samuel actually appeared in the session at Endor:

First, the woman could easily have denounced herself when she found out that her *customer* was the king who had decreed death to all who called up the dead.

Secondly, the Bible says that Samuel spoke to Saul. These words cannot be easily misunderstood.

Even the admission that Samuel was called up from the dead does not help the Spiritist in his cause. We read in the Bible that Saul was put to death for consulting the dead (1 Chronicles 10:13).

As to the idea that God would not do what He forbids others to do: those who can make a law can set it aside. A law made for man is not necessarily applicable to God. Just as God set aside a natural law to let Balaam's donkey tell the prophet his error, so He could set aside a spiritual law to reveal His displeasure to a wicked king and to show His select nation the consequences of disobedience.

Conclusion

From these four cases, we see that Spiritists grasp at straws to prove their most improbable claims. Anyone who can read should be able to discern God's displeasure in mediums and those who use them to consult the dead.

God himself has revealed from the spirit world what He wants us to know. He plainly forbids other spirit-linked means of trying to learn more about it. To try to use them violates His will and invites His displeasure.

If love for His ways does not deter us from this sin, fear of His wrath should. If neither love nor fear moves us, He can but let us reap what we sow.

GLENN OWEN in "Communion Quester"

FAITH HAS ENDURING FOUNDATION

TAKING a scriptural survey, we read of "the foundation of our faith." The Egyptians built the pyramids on solid ground with the widest and firmest of foundations then known. Not defying the centre of gravity, they still stand. We, by faith in God, do infinitely better. We have limitless foundation built on the solid rock Christ Jesus: Col. 1:15-23; 2:5-7 leaves us in no doubt on this. If we heed 1 Cor. 16:13-14, we shall not need to "examine ourselves to know whether we are in the faith." We shall be growing constantly in the faith, rejoicing in His name through His grace and faithfulness.

Faith is a structure. Paul exhorts us in Heb. 6:11 not to be concerned with constant and repeated foundation-laying, but to press on to the completion of the building which, when finished, is perfect.

Faith is a door. Eph. 3:12: "Access with confidence by the faith of Him"; Rom. 5:2: "We have access by faith." Paul and Barnabas (Acts 14:27) tell how "God had opened the door of faith to gentiles."

Faith is a purifier. Peter says (Acts 15:9): "God purified the hearts of the gentiles, who had received the Holy Spirit by faith."

Faith is a sanctifier, i.e. setting us apart from sin. Jesus told Paul He would send him to the gentiles (Acts 26:18) "to open their eyes and turn them from the power of Satan and darkness, to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith in Jesus." How needful in this generation, for strengthening and sanctifying by faith; that we turn from increasing darkness, so manifested by unbelief and the accompanying falling away from truth. Is it not equally necessary to devote increasing time to the way by which faith reaches us? Rom. 10:17: "Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God." Jesus says (Matt. 10:15): "He that hath ears to hear let him hear." We must then be willing hearers, this is Jesus' instruction as to how we hear and read. As a natural sequence, if we increase our reading of God's Word, we increase our faith.

Paul in 2 Tim. 2:15 defines the course already set for us to follow: "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." Studious reading, then, of God's Word is essential if we would increase our faith in Him. Recalling that Jesus learned obedience, for us to read God's Word without obedience to His Word is futile. Keeping the accent on the positive demands that we read God's Word increasingly, studiously, faithfully and that we be obedient and diligent. All of which we have established from The Word.

Faith is a life-giver. Gal. 2:20: "I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."

Faith is a justifier. Gal. 2:16: "A man is not justified by works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ."

Faith is activated by love. Gal. 5:6: "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but faith which worketh by love."

Faith is an energiser. Jas. 2:22: "—and by works was faith made perfect"; "Faith without works is dead." Luke 7:37-50 tells of the works of a woman together with faith, so approved by Jesus that He said "—thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace." Our faith should motivate us, only to His approval. Rom. 14:23: "And whatsoever is not of faith is sin." This rules out any possibility of our participation, or even our acquiescing in anything in which we do not believe, or for which we cannot hope and pray for His blessing.

After considering the foregoing irrefutable qualities and virtues of a perfect faith in God and His righteousness, its multi-dimensional character is inescapable. Having acknowledged who is the author, finisher and upholder of our faith in God, it is right to state that faith in our Lord and Master is the God-given part of man, to be used obediently, increasingly to the glory of Him from whom that righteously virtuous grace emanates. Let our prayer be—'Lord increase our faith.'

(Concluded)

J. A. GREGORY

EXAMINING COMMON ROOTS

The religious movement comprising those who desire to be known as *Christians only* has been characterized by two foci of concern—Christian unity and restoration of New Testament Christianity.

Introduction

Contrary to what might be expected, holding to these two aspects of the plea has caused several problems in the movement. One of these problems is defining the nature of Christian unity and clarifying the meaning of restoration. Even more difficult has been the tension arising from the attempt to hold together these two aims in one plea—of seeking unity while seeking to realize the church of the New Testament.

Involvement Relates Unity and Restoration

All too frequently the history of the movement has witnessed the tendency to relieve this tension by emphasis upon one or the other of these goals. This article reflects the conviction that, notwithstanding these problems, unity and restoration belong together. Each, properly defined, involves the other; and, when considered in the perspective of Christian mission, the two necessarily belong together.

1. *Unity and restoration refer to one another.* Neither Christian unity nor restoration of New Testament Christianity can logically exist as an aim without reference to the other. For example, concern for recovery of the New Testament church (restoration) involves recognition that one of the essential marks of the church in apostolic teaching was its unity—a truth to which *I Corinthians* bears eloquent witness.

At the same time, however, concern for Christian unity raises the question, "What is the basis of a unity that can be called Christian?" This question leads to consideration of the norm for the church.

2. *Unity and restoration involve one another.* Advocates of the plea to restore apostolic Christianity have rightly appealed to that age as affording the only adequate basis on which to ground Christian unity.

The New Testament is the norm by which each may examine his response to the Lordship of Christ, being thus drawn to the Lord and thereby to others in Christ. Hence, a proper analysis of the concepts of unity and restoration leads to the conclusion that they belong together because each involves the other.

Mission Relates Unity and Restoration

There is, however, another way of establishing the relation of these two concepts of unity and restoration—Christian mission. This motif has not been sufficiently considered as a means of relating the plea for restoration and the plea for unity. In a day when those who recognize Alexander Campbell's insight (into how to be *Christians only*) seek self-understanding and recovery of internal unity. Christian mission takes on even greater significance as the theme that unites the twin goals of the movement.

1. *Christian mission demands Christian unity.* What, then, is the relation of unity and restoration to mission? On the one hand, the Christian mission demands Christian unity because of the relation of the church's mission to its nature as the body of Christ. This expression, *body of Christ*, identifies the church with the foundational affirmation of Christianity, the Incarnation. The church was created to do two things relative to the Gospel:

It was to embody, or carry forward, the revelation of God made in Christ. Thus, the church is described as the "pillar and ground of the truth," the truth being that God "was manifested in the flesh" (1 Tim. 3:15, 16).

In addition, the church was to exhibit the fellowship created by the revelation of God in Christ. Every phase of the church's life is comprehended under the term *fellowship*.

Hence, the church has not only the vocation of proclaiming the gospel but, by its very nature, it is to embody that gospel and exhibit the fellowship created by it. In its life, the church is to exhibit both the content of the gospel (reconciliation) and the effect of the gospel (fellowship). Hence, division among followers of Christ not only does violence to the church's essential character as the body of Christ, but it also destroys its capacity by its very existence as the body of Christ to exemplify the gospel. Thus, divisions hinder the accomplishment of mission.

In this light, we may understand the concern of Christ for unity (John 17:20, 21). In His mind, the church was so inseparably connected with His mission that the success of the latter was dependent upon the unity of the body which was to carry it out in the world. Christian mission, therefore, demands Christian unity.

2. *Christian mission demands the New Testament as final authority.* At the same time, Christian mission makes necessary the appeal for New Testament Christianity as normative. If the church was created for mission, then the nature and content of Christian mission defines what the church must be.

It is implicit in the idea of creating an instrument to perform a task that the instrument so created be given a character in keeping with the task. Thus, the church, created by our Lord for mission, finds its nature in His mind and purpose as reflected in the New Testament.

Mission also involves the nature of the church in another way. This is so because the church's mission goes beyond the task of making disciples. Its mission is also to edify—to build up those who are in Christ. Thus, the church is a fellowship who have come to know God in Christ.

The nature of this fellowship, which is a sharing or participation, will be determined by the content of the gospel which is shared and about which the fellowship has its centre. Insofar as mission involves fellowship, the content of mission (the gospel) determines the nature of the church as fellowship.

The appeal to New Testament Christianity, properly understood, is but an appeal that the church truly reflect in its life what it seeks to accomplish by its commitment to the mission of Christ. Hence, Christian mission makes valid the plea for the restoration of New Testament Christianity, not as a goal in itself, but as a necessary accompaniment of mission itself.

Conclusion

Surely one does not have to seek out reasons for carrying out Christian mission. That the Lord of the church commands it should be reason enough.

But if another reason were to be sought, it would be that in a renewed commitment to Christian mission lies the hope of the brotherhood of *Christians only* for a revitalization of their aims and renewal of their spiritual life.

W. J. RICHARDSON in "Communion Quester"

CHRISTIAN GIVING

It is required (1 Cor. 16:1, 2) that our giving be regular ("Upon the first day of the week"), individual ("each one of you") and proportionate ("as he may prosper").

The fuller treatment in the eighth and ninth chapters of second Corinthians shows that brethren in "deep poverty" can give liberally (8:2-4) by first giving "their own selves to the Lord" (v. 5); that such should "abound in this grace" (7); that acceptability depends upon the "readiness" (willingness) of the giver (12); that co-operation brings about "equality" and prevents distress (13-15).

In the ninth chapter, Paul shows the utility of a good example (2); that he was very careful to see that they kept their pledge (3-5); that it is right to promise a gift before the time of giving (5); that he intended to have the gift whether as a matter of liberality or of covetousness (5); that reaping (blessing) is proportionate with sowing (giving) (6); and that each person is to give "as he hath purposed in his heart" and do it cheerfully (7). It is to be observed that "God is able to make all grace abound unto you; that ye, having always all sufficiency in everything, may abound unto every good work" (8, 9) and that he will do this "and increase the fruits of your righteousness" (10). Can you discern six things resulting from "the ministration of this service," this contribution (12, 13)?

Please note that "abound" means primarily "to overflow." Go through the chapters with this in mind. These two fine sections deserve hours of study and will appeal all the more in the light of the appended comments by A. T. Pierson.

"In 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, is the one discourse on giving that makes needless all other treatment of this great theme, and it is noticeable that the two chapters not only present every grand principle and motive of consecrated giving, but they present seven paradoxes that are very remarkable. These Macedonians seem to have furnished the most singular examples of Christian benevolence to be found anywhere in sacred Scripture; their giving was a sort of reversal of all ordinary experience.

1. They gave out of the abundance of their poverty, not out of the plenitude of their wealth.
2. Their willingness exceeded their ability, instead of their ability exceeding their willingness.

3. They were urgent to be allowed to give, rather than reluctant; while those who received the gift were reluctant to take it, knowing how deep was their poverty.

4. They made the greater gift first (of themselves), and the latter gift was the less (their money). Usually people give the least they can to begin with, and have to be educated up to giving themselves at the very last.

5. In these chapters value of gift is reckoned not by the amount given, but by the degree of willingness and cheerfulness exhibited.

6. We are here taught that increase comes not by keeping, but by giving: that the way to get more is to give more, and the way to lose is to keep.

7. And the crowning lesson of all is that they regarded giving not as a privation to be evaded and avoided, but as a blessing and a privilege to be courted and cultivated. Can we do better than follow such a glorious example?"

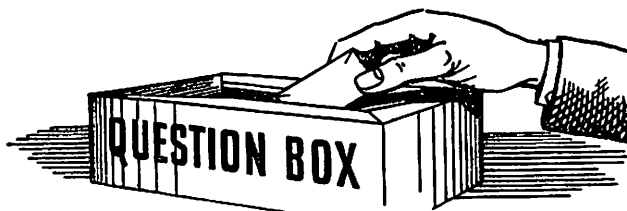
No one need wait till the judgment to know that an inordinate desire of riches, "covetousness, which is idolatry," is set down with "fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire," as things which should be put to death—"for which things' sake cometh the wrath of God upon the sons of disobedience" (Col. 3:5, 6). Remember.

"There is that scattereth, and increaseth yet more; And there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth only to want.

The liberal soul shall be made fat; And he that watereth shall be watered also himself . . .

He that trusteth in his riches shall fall; But the righteous shall flourish as the green leaf" (Proverbs 11:24-28).

DON CARLOS JANES in "The Truth"



Conducted by
James Gardiner

We know of and have seen the evidences of the inspiration of man, and we know of the inspiration of God. Is it possible that man's inspiration was given by God to be used in God's service?

"Inspiration" as Ability

THROUGHOUT the centuries countless men and women have displayed the possession of special qualities, abilities and capacities for accomplishing great ends and deeds, to the betterment of the state of man and to the enriching of his life on earth. A legion of painters, sculptors, musicians, poets, scientists, physicians, engineers, social reformers and philanthropists have left a legacy of culture and a way of life behind them. As the questioner suggests, many of history's great men and women were "inspired" persons and their inspiration coupled with their native skills and abilities led to their doing the memorable things they did.

Secondary meanings given to the word "inspire" is "to fill with creative power," "to instil in the mind," "to influence a person to attain a state of controlled excitement." In view of these meanings it certainly seems to be accurate to talk of the "inspiration of man," for many of the world's artisans have been and are "filled with creative powers." How they use such skills is, of course, another matter, and like the servants in the parable of the talents, is something for which they will account to God.

Some, as Handel, could write music like "The Messiah," while others of us could not string two notes together even if our very life depended upon it! The poor unfortunates who can't appreciate musical harmonies would have been just as pleased if Handel had not bothered to compose "The Messiah." There are those, too, on whom the talents of the artist are lost and for whom the colour, composition and skill of the canvas mean little or nothing. Indeed there are those who would say that the arts of writing, painting, musical composition and poetry are vain and worldly pleasures in any case.

Of course there is nothing wrong with many worldly pleasures—eating our food is a worldly pleasure. God made the world lavishly and breathtakingly beautiful (man made the grimy cities) and God has made man capable of enjoying and appreciating such beauty. Can we be surprised therefore that man should want to commit such beauty to the permanency of a canvas, or an orchestral score, or a sonnet? Such desires and abilities surely only serve to emphasise the gulf between man and the monkey. God has made man capable of responding to the beauty of nature, and so when man's response is crystallized in the arts we can say that God has *indirectly* inspired man in that God implanted in man those finer feelings (so often obscured) and that God also made "all things bright and beautiful." True, such abilities can be used in a good way or a bad—books, paintings or poetry can be uplifting or disgusting; but I agree with the questioner that such gifts of inspiration in men can be used in God's service. Beauty can inspire the painter—compassion can also "inspire" men and women to lofty action and the emancipation of the downtrodden. Compassion is a God-given emotion, and has in history inspired many social reformers and induced many instances of beneficence and philanthropy. Our hospitals and prisons owe much to the efforts of two "inspired" women—Florence Nightingale and Elizabeth Fry, inspired not directly by God but *indirectly* by their anguish for the sufferings of their fellow-creatures—surely an *attitude* of divine origin.

The faithfulness of the martyrs can "inspire" us, when we read of the appalling things which befell them prior to their execution, to stand up more bravely for the Master. Such men as Daniel cannot fail but to "inspire" us with a great desire to match his undaunted spirit and unswerving faith and courage. Many Old Testament incidents are recorded that we might not only be "warned" by some of them but surely "inspired" by others.

Divine Inspiration

The apostles and some of the early disciples were inspired men too, but, by a very different kind of inspiration indeed—direct inspiration; verbal inspiration.

Such were not moved or inspired by God-given emotions or abilities, but they were moved by the Holy Spirit and inspired by the direct operation of God. If it be thought that little scripture has been quoted so far may it be realised that the word "inspiration" appears but twice in the entire bible, once in Job 32:8 and 2 Tim. 3:16. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works," or (R.V.) "every scripture inspired of God"; Job 32:8: "But there is a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding."

These are the only two scriptures implementing the word "inspiration," but of course there are other passages referring to the inspiration of God which do not directly employ the word. 1 Peter 1:20, 21 is a case in point, where Peter says, ". . . no prophecy of scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."

When we talk therefore of man being "inspired" we must be clear in our minds about the kind of inspiration we envisage, for there is a vast difference between the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and any other kind of inspiration or zeal brought about by human enthusiasms or emotions. God's record has been completed some 2,000 years ago, and so we have no reason for believing the claims of any man to be currently

under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. However, man will doubtless continue to be subject to the interaction of his emotions and his environment. Contemplation of the love of God, observation of the power of God (in creation) and admiration of the beautiful *handiwork* of God will no doubt continue to move and "inspire" man to acts of faith, kindness and charity. Jesus it was who translated attributes of the divine into the harrowing cut and thrust of earthly existence and the daily round, and as we read of Him, who can fail to be "inspired" to try to follow His example?

To the questioner then I would say that not only *can* the fruits of man's "inspiration" be used in God's service, but *ought* to be used in His service. If anyone has a skill, dexterity, facility, ability or talent he or she may be sure that such has been given by God and should be employed in His service. If anyone feels a zeal for God, a lofty aspiration or inspiration (call it what we may) to further God's end and to help his fellow man may it be that such enthusiasm will not be dulled by the cold disinterest of others but shall find its true expression in our Lord's service and indeed even be a means of "inspiring" others to efforts greater.

"Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or *whatsoever ye do*, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31).

(Questions please to James Gardiner, 88 Davidson Terrace, Haddington, East Lothian)

SCRIPTURE READINGS

APRIL 1968

7—Hosea 6	Matt. 9:1-17
14—I Kings 17:8-24	Matt. 9:18-34
21—Psalm 23	Matt. 9:35 to 10:15
28—Isaiah 8:5-22	Matt. 10:16 to 11:1

FORGIVENESS

This is a universal need. Not one of us is without the need of forgiveness. We need it from our fellows whom we have injured, misunderstood or maligned, or of whom we have harboured unkind thoughts. We certainly need it from our Creator. Consciousness of sin has to come to us before we can realise the greatness of this need, and the Holy Spirit through the Word provides the motive and the evidence (John 16:8). The peerless life of Jesus brings it home to us.

Once we come to understand the exceeding sinfulness of sin, we long for the assurance that forgiveness is possible. Every sin we commit, whether consciously or not, harms someone else. Some sins

injure thousands, and nothing (or very little indeed) can be done to cancel out or modify their effects. We think for the moment of Tom Paine's "Age of Reason," which must have sown unbelief in many hearts. We understand he did repent, but what restitution could be made? If we can make comparison on such a point, this is the most wonderful facet of divine forgiveness, for we are assured that "who-soever" will may through faith, repentance and obedience come to the place of remission—the "will" is essential, of course. The thoughts of J. B. Phillips in the Foreword to "Ring of Truth" (H. & S. Paperback, 3/6) are well worth reading. This forgiveness is only made possible by the shedding of the blood of Jesus—"The Lamb of God Who taketh away the sin of the world." It is almost unbelievable grace that when we come to repentance, and restitution has become impossible, there is still divine forgiveness. No wonder the apostle wrote "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?" (Rom. 6:1). What a common human failing it is to take advantage of kindness! The Lord forbid it among His people. The One Who is greater than our hearts can alone relieve the burden (I John 3:20).

We are faced in this month's readings with forgiveness granted by express word of Jesus during His ministry. We read in Matt. 9:6 "The Son of Man has the right on earth to forgive sins" (N.E.B.). We may ask "Why did Jesus use this right so seldom?" We find, as we regard it, four occasions only, but we recognise that He may have spoken quietly and without publicity or record to many more individuals in the same way. Four incidents are recorded in the gospels:— the sinful woman (Luke 7:48); the paralytic (our present reading, Matt. 9:1-8); the woman taken in adultery (John 8:11) and the robber on the cross (Luke 23:43).

Four Cases of Forgiveness

In the case of the sinful woman we might almost say the forgiveness was drawn from the Saviour—but that would be an injustice to the kindest One. She came with heartfelt gratitude and true repentance to show love and appreciation to One who had spoken and acted kindly to sinners. Simon the Pharisee had had the grace to invite Jesus to sit at his table—a considerable point in his favour. He had omitted, perhaps in forgetfulness, the common courtesies, and the woman's offering was used to point the lesson and to teach as well as to grant forgiveness. She went "in peace." Her faith accepted the forgiveness without question and her heart rejoiced. The guests had questioned the Teacher's standing: that point was settled by His action and words. Surely their hearts were touched by His grace, and moved by His claim to divine authority!

The paralytic received immediate word of forgiveness. Obviously this was his greatest need, as it is mankind's. We are safe to assume he regarded his paralysis as connected with his sin (and so it may have been) and the Saviour applied the spiritual remedy first. He knew but it is not revealed to us, just what that man's condition was. There was also the audience. Pharisees and teachers of the law were present to watch and mark every word (Luke 5:17), and the multitude thronged around. "The power of the Lord was with Him to heal," indicating many miracles of healing to substantiate every word He spoke. The case of the paralytic was one among hundreds. How

full and ample for open minds were the evidences of divine approval, and yet those best educated for the most part remained unconvinced and found excuses for unbelief. The claim to authority was calculated to shock and astonish and convince—and it did antagonise: but to the paralytic it brought peace, and the confirmation of it gave him physical fitness. We can only rather dimly picture the effect upon the crowd.

Our two remaining cases of personal forgiveness differ very much. By the law of Moses the woman taken in adultery should have been stoned. The Son of Man Who is "Lord of the sabbath" had authority (Mark 2:28) also to remit the sentence for adultery. Jesus did not say "Thy sins are forgiven," but He did say "Neither do I condemn thee." Her sin was forgiven, but we must note His command implying a condition of future forgiveness "go, and sin no more," and we assume this condition applies also in the other two cases we have considered.

The robber in his dying agony seems at first to have joined in the jibes at Jesus, but his words (Matt. 27:44; Luke 23:39-43) show that he knew the life Jesus had been living, and was conscious of the contrast in His bearing. So much so that his conscience was awakened. He craved forgiveness, and believed *this man was a king* and had a *kingdom to come*. Thus he was pardoned. Here is no justification for "death-bed salvation"—though God forbid that we should say such is impossible. The message of the gospel remains our hope of forgiveness.

Jesus said also a solemn truth for us all when He warned against the unforgiving spirit which can cancel our own pardon (Matt. 6:15). The justifying prayer is still that of the publican (Luke 18:13).

R. B. SCOTT

NEWS FROM THE CHURCHES

Bonteheuwel (South Africa). — From the "Woodstock Church Bulletin" of February 8th comes the news of the opening of the new meeting-house on January 20th, in a coloured township of

some 22,000 houses. From congregations in other parts of South Africa 283 attended the opening ceremony, with several speakers from the various assemblies. At an evening gospel meeting 140 were present.

The joy of the occasion was increased by the baptism on January 24th of Miss Brunhilde-Scott.

Kirkcaldy.—It is with joy that the church meeting in Hayfield Road (formerly Rose Street) reports that on the first Lord's Day in our new meeting-house, Alex Lowrie, husband of our Sister Betty, confessed the name of Christ and was immersed. We are indebted to the brethren at Dunfermline for the use of their facilities.

After our Gospel Service a good number of brethren and friends made the journey through fog by car to Dunfermline, where Bro. John Moyes took the good confession and Bro. Jim Davidson immersed Brother Alex. We have indeed much to be thankful for, and we thank our Heavenly Father for all his blessings. We pray that our new brother in Christ will be built up in the faith and go from strength to strength in His service.

Wigan (Albert Street).—An evangelistic campaign was held from February 24th to March 10th. Meetings were held each night of the two weeks except Fridays. We had the services of Bro. Clarence Eckman, evangelist of Belfast, who endeared himself to all by his preaching of the gospel, exhorting the church and teaching in Bible school. The inspiring messages were very helpful. Our brother never tired and his visitation of members, helped by Bro. Albert Winstanley and Bro. Philip Partington, was appreciated by all. The meetings were well attended, with a large number of non-members at some. We feel the effort well worthwhile and trust that the seed sown will bring forth fruit for the Master. On Thursday evening, March 7th, we had the joy of seeing a young man, Kenneth Barton, who had attended one or two meetings, and Valerie Mannion, the wife of Bro. David Mannion, make the good confession and follow Jesus in baptism. We

trust they will be kept faithful and be useful in the Master's service. Bro. Allan Leyland and Sis. Ruth Grundy were received back into fellowship. The rich fellowship enjoyed by all will long remain in our hearts and give encouragement for the work of the Lord in the future.

We give thanks to Bro. Eckman, to the members of many churches near and far, Bros. Albert Winstanley and Philip Partington; also to the many visitors for their attendance, help, and support in this gospel mission; and to our Heavenly Father for the abundant blessings that have been ours in Christ Jesus. We pray that we all may remain "steadfast, always abounding in the work of the Lord."

W.S.

OBITUARY

Buckie.—We regret to record the passing of Sister Isabella J. Reid on the 13th February at the age of 83 years.

Until ill-health prevented her, our sister, who had to travel from Portgordon, was always at the Lord's Table, and she liked being amongst her brethren.

The funeral was conducted at her home by Bro. Alex Harper and at the cemetery by Bro. George Reid.

Our sympathy goes out to her daughter, who nursed and cared for her.

John Geddes

Tranent.—With deep sorrow we report the passing from this life of Sister Elizabeth Plain, who fell asleep on February 27th in her 74th year. She had suffered an illness for a long time, and endured with patience and fortitude. She was baptised early in life and as a young woman had a keen interest in Sunday School work.

Our deepest sympathy goes out to her family who mourn the loss of their mother very deeply. We commend them to our Heavenly Father, who is the source of comfort and consolation, and to Jesus Christ our Redeemer, who is willing and able to heal the broken heart.

Mark Plain

COMING EVENTS

Wallacestone. — Special gospel mission during April and May (DV).

Wallacestone Meeting Place: Sundays, 6 p.m.; Mondays, 7.30 p.m.

Laurieston Community Hall: Wednesdays, 7.30 p.m.

Limerigg Church Hall: Sundays, 7.30 p.m.

Speakers: April, Bro. Paul Jones; May, Bro. David Dougall.

The meetings at Laurieston are in a new area, untouched by God's true gospel. The meetings at Limerigg are to be held in conjunction with the church at Slamanan, continuing the good work they began November-January.

We ask for your prayers and support during this effort and pray that we shall receive the Lord's blessing. To Him be the glory.

Spring Conference Week-End, Easter, 1968, April 13th, 14th, 15th, Petticoat Lane, Ince-in-Makerfield, Wigan, Lancashire.

Saturday, 13th.—2.0 to 3.0 p.m., Conference business session. 3.15 to 4.15 p.m., 1 The Family of God (G. Gorton, Rochdale); 2 Begotten by God (R. B. Scott, London). 4.45 to 5.30 p.m., Buffet tea. 6.45 p.m., Gospel proclamation, Frank Worgan (Corby).

Sunday, 14th. — 10.30 a.m., Sunday School. 11.30 a.m., Breaking of bread, Frank Worgan. 6.0 p.m., Gospel proclamation, Frank Worgan.

Monday, 15th. — 10.30 to 11.30 a.m., Devotion, R. B. Scott. 2.0 p.m., an afternoon outing.

For accommodation please write early to John Partington, 86 Lord Street, Hindley, Wigan, Lancashire.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS

Bro. & Sis. Colin and Patricia Leyland, 526 Queen's Promenade, Cleveleys, Blackpool. Tel. Cleveleys 3826.

Bro. & Sis. Leyland have some accommodation for brethren who wish to spend holidays in or near Cleveleys, and would welcome such visitors.

A CORRECTION

By an extraordinary error, the date of birth of Judith Ruth Bennett to Elizabeth and Edward Bennett, was given as October 11th, 1967, instead of February 11th, 1968 ("S.S." March, p. 36). Please note the correction, in order that your first birthday cards will be sent on the right day in 1969!

We offer our sincere regrets to Bro. and Sis. Bennett for annoyance and confusion caused by this error.

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