

The SCRIPTURE STANDARD

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

VOL.57 No.2

FEBRUARY, 1989

FIELDS WHITE UNTO HARVEST

The most important work we can ever do in this life is to preach the gospel. True Christianity would transform the world overnight. Very few would challenge this statement yet we seem to have a very careless, even casual, approach to this vital work. Indeed it seems true that as long as we Break Bread and attend meetings regularly the actual preaching of the gospel takes a subsidiary role: a kind of optional extra. Certainly we hold gospel meetings each Sunday and stand ready to preach the gospel to those who care to call but if the public won't come to our meetings we feel that it is their 'hard cheese' and that we have fulfilled our obligations to them. We are available at our meeting-houses, but if the people won't come, we feel that there is not much we can do about it. This is obviously a broad generalisation and no doubt there are exceptions, but do we really do enough in the sowing of the seed? Are we just 'keeping house' for the Lord: just 'Holding the Fort' until Christ returns?

The generation which fails in this work has an adverse effect on the generations which follow, and perhaps we can, today, see evidence of this and a dearth of younger members. Where there is no preaching of an effective kind, there can be no additions to our ranks. Paul said, "**Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe on Him of whom they have not heard? AND HOW SHALL THEY HEAR WITHOUT A PREACHER?**" (Rom.10:13) We are all obligated to be preachers of the gospel but how far do we meet our obligation? There can be no true faith in the world other than by a proclaiming of the gospel for "**Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God**" (Rom. 10:17). John reminds us that the N.T. contains only a very small sample of what Jesus both said and did, and estimates that the world itself could not contain the books if it had all been recorded. He also said, "**Many other signs therefore did Jesus in the presence of the disciples which are not written in this book, but these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life in His name.**" (John 20:31). The farmer who has not sown the seed can never expect the harvest. Perhaps we often look for a harvest when, in fact, we have not sown. Peter asserts to the dispersed Christians that they had "**purified their souls in obeying the truth**" and that they had "**been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which liveth and abideth for ever**" (1 Peter 1:23). It is 'the Truth' that makes men free: it is the 'Word' that saves mens' souls: and the 'Gospel' is God's power unto the salvation of all, Jews and Gentiles.

Yes, preaching the gospel is the most important work we can ever do. The seed must reach the soil.

PARABLE OF THE SOWER

Those congregations currently using the "Scripture Reading Cards" compiled by bro. Hugh Davidson, will know that we have reached Mark Chap. 4 where Jesus begins to speak in parables. His first parable is probably one of the best known: a sower went forth to sow. When asked to explain the parable Jesus said that the seed represented the gospel, and that the different kinds of earth typified the varying dispositions of the hearts of men, into which the seed fell. In this corner of Scotland farmers use highly sophisticated farm machinery and seed is sown in very neat drills, at a predetermined density, nothing being wasted. In the parable, the 'broadcast' method was used; seed being scattered in all directions; falling where it may. Thus everyone, everywhere, is to be given the opportunity of hearing the gospel, at least once, and has a right to that opportunity.

Jesus, in His wisdom, was able to categorise the fickleness of the human heart, into only four broad types. (1) Some seed fell upon the hard, well-trodden footpath edging the field and the birds came and devoured it ere it could germinate. This referred to the gospel falling upon hearts preoccupied with the daily round. Before any firm reaction could be registered to the seed, and even while the hearers contemplated the meaning of the words, the devil acted promptly and snatched away the gospel "lest they should believe and be saved". (2) The second category included hearts basically rather shallow and superficial. This was the stony ground where notwithstanding the seed germinated it was later scorched by the sun there being no deeprootedness. Thus some hearts quickly embrace the gospel but when the testing times come; trials, tribulations and persecutions the faith is hastily renounced and a return is made to the former mode of life. (3) Some seed fell amongst thorns and although it grew it was ultimately choked to death, by the much more stronger presence of the weeds and thorns. This, said Jesus, represented those who, in all good faith, obeyed the gospel but as the years went by succumbed to "the cares of this world" (domestic; family and workplace problems) and to the pursuit of worthless pleasures and the deceitfulness of riches. (4) Lastly, there was the seed that fell into earnest and honest hearts and blossomed into a healthy and happy maturity. Jesus did not quote likely percentages in each group, but I suppose the average Palestinian farmer would have expected **most** of the seed to have been fruitful, and only a fairly small amount lost on the hard and stony ground. It is frightening to realise that **absolutely everybody** is mentioned in this parable and is in one of those four categories. Perhaps this wonderful parable can suggest reasons to us, as to why the gospel is not so successful these days. And should there not be a fifth category: i.e. those who have, so far, never had the opportunity of hearing the gospel message?

ANALYSE THE DIFFICULTIES

Perhaps our main problem is getting past Category No. 1; i.e. to get people to linger long enough to listen to the preached word. Before the devil can snatch away the seed, the seed has to be there in the first place. Perhaps the seed is still in the bag, in the barn. This would appear to be the first problem. We can't lament about lack of results if the seed is still in the shed. Perhaps there is also a lack of good gospel literature for distribution and we should think about that. Do we hand out musty old Victorian tracts with rusty staples? Is it a 'turn off' to the public that we seem so inept or poverty-stricken that our literature has had to come all the way from Abilene or St. Louis? What percentage of church income would we be willing to spend on gospel literature compared with the other things we spend it on?

Having said that, I suppose it is also true that there is a **general antipathy** on the part of the general public to nominal Christianity, but moreso to "Bible Punchers"; "do-gooders" and "Holy Wullie's". Even amongst denominational church members there is a tendency for them to be 'out' when the 'minister' calls and furtive hiding

behind the front-room curtains. In such a climate we cannot wonder at gospel meetings getting a wide berth.

Then again, the public's usual conception of 'good news' is being told they 'have won the pools' or a local raffle: it certainly does not refer to a call to moral reformation and prompt repentance. They can understand some prize here and now, but the promise of life everlasting is too much like "pie in the sky" and not tangible enough to a materially-minded world.

Then there is our historical background of several centuries of religious division and bigotry, personified in the Catholic/Protestant antagonism. There are now countless religious cults, groups and denominations all asserting their unique claim to be the true faith. Jesus prayed that His followers might all be one: **"that the world might believe."** Sad to relate, division is not unknown among the churches of Christ with the consequent difficulty of explaining to young converts the flimsy nature of the things that divide them. This disunity has certainly not helped evangelistic efforts, has it?

At one time large attendances at Public Meetings was assured: even at open air meetings a hearing could be got, but over the last 30 years the television-watching syndrome has arisen, and life is now structured around peak viewing time. It is increasingly difficult to call at homes without incurring great displeasure if interrupting a favourite 'soap'. On receiving visitors some people merely turn down the sound and continue to squint at the set while talking, mostly at cross-purposes, with their 'welcome' guests. In this week's 'Life & Work' I notice that the C. of Scot. elders are having this difficulty and increasingly can't find a suitable night to call, and are giving up the effort. Notwithstanding, if a Public Meeting is **interesting enough**, some viewers can be prised away from their deity: but it's not easy.

Most people know enough about Christ's teachings to realise that the gospel will require great changes in their mode of living, and so go to some lengths to avoid it. They reckon it may entail them having to give up something they hold very dear: i.e. the occasional drink at the 'local'; their football pools, their cigarettes, the occasional flutter on the horses or whatever else they may enjoy. Thus the gospel would be a 'kill-joy' to them and they steer clear. With others, they may have to change jobs and they might lose some of their friends and become very unpopular. In some countries they might even lose their freedom. In Christ's day **"among the chief rulers also many believed on Him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue."** There are also a large number of unmarried couples now 'living together', and they naturally fight shy of Christ and His teachings.

Then there are those who think they are beyond even God's redemption. They reckon that they are so morally weak that they could never improve, and so they would not even try. "I could never live up to the standard that Jesus set". They say they can't even keep New Year Resolutions much less live up to Christ's example. And so they say, "Just let me be I'm quite happy as I am."

There are also those who think they are **too good** to need to be saved. They claim (perhaps rightly) that they never do their neighbour any harm and they live as good a moral life as any-body could wish. They help old ladies across streets and feed the odd stray cat. They also give to charity and read the Bible now and then. They point to all the hypocrites in the churches, and say (probably quite rightly) "I am as good as they are. If they go to heaven, then so will I, so please take your gospel to those more in need of it." This attitude is widespread.

If space permitted we could, I suppose, think of all the other factors which militate against the progress of the gospel. There are those who are "too young"; those who are "too old"; those who "are not sure"; those who will "have to think about it"; those who "might later"; those who are "too busy" and so on. We should try and

learn the thinking behind all these different attitudes and in a sympathetic way try and allay any genuine fears and misunderstandings. It is certainly wrong to force conversions so that the Evangelist's Report (back to his supporting congregation) might look good; and Jesus Himself suggested that men and women should 'count the cost' before enlisting in the ranks as 'soldiers of the cross'.

PREACH THE WORD: IN SEASON AND OUT

I began with the general proposition that our most important work is the preaching of the gospel, and would only now add that we must not be deterred by the difficulties. Paul himself did not have much success with the philosophers in Athens, and Agrippa reacted to his preaching by saying, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." Difficulties however, never ever diminished Paul's enthusiasm or resolve. He describes how he 'died a thousand deaths' for the gospel in beatings, floggings, imprisonments, stoning, in shipwreck and constant perils (2 Cor. II) and later, like most of the other apostles, he paid the supreme price – with his life. Yes, Paul considered it an important work. The preaching was not confined to appointed apostles, however, but **all the Christians** in Jerusalem, when persecuted, "went everywhere preaching the word". We must all do the same.

Jews were, literally, born into their religion: but men and women **must be invited** into Christianity. The invitation must go out. Jesus said, "The fields are white unto harvest" (which envisages a ripe harvest rather than bare earth awaiting the sower) and He doubtless meant that there are souls 'out there' waiting to be saved, if only someone would go and find them. "But", Jesus added, "the labourers are few". This probably, is still the real problem.

Perhaps we can profit by pondering the public's reaction to our efforts and seek ways to be more effective. Certainly the theatres have no problem in getting large audiences. Why? – it has been said that actors present fiction as if it was truth: whereas the clergy are presenting the truth as if it was fiction. Certainly Peter so convicted his hearers of their sins that they cried out, "What shall we do"? His one sermon produced 3,000 converts. Today, it seems to take 3,000 sermons to make one convert.

One thing is certain: the message must never be amended or compromised just to get numbers. The seed sown **must only be** "the good seed of the gospel". Christ's second parable tells of the one who sows the tares, the weeds and the falsehood: the devil. The curse of God rests upon all those, men or angels, who preach "any other gospel" than that which the apostles preached. Methods, and even styles, in preaching may vary but the message must never be adulterated to accommodate the whims of the hearers.

It has been suggested that conditions today have never been better for spreading the good news. Transport is readily available and gospel literature can easily be produced. There are all kinds of interesting and innovative ways of presenting the truth (even 'Christian Video') and our laws and governments are not hostile or repressive. This is all probably very true and should we not be making the most of the opportunity presented to us? Paul said, "Woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel of Christ." Woe indeed.

EDITOR.

GLEANINGS

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

PERFECT LOVE

"There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love." I John 4:18

FOR GOD IS LOVE**“He that loveth not knoweth not God.” I John 4:8**

“The distinguishing mark of a Christian is his confidence in the love of Christ, and the yielding of his affections to Christ in return. First, faith sets her seal upon the man by enabling the soul to say with the apostle, “Christ loved me and gave Himself for me.” Then love gives the countersign, and stamps upon the heart gratitude and love to Jesus in return. “We love Him because He first loved us.”

THEY WERE MEN WHO KNEW THE LOVE OF CHRIST

“In those grand old ages, which are the heroic period of the Christian religion, this double mark was clearly to be seen in all believers in Jesus; they were men who knew the love of Christ, and rested upon it as a man leaneth upon a staff whose trustiness he has tried.”

NOT A QUIET EMOTION

“The love which they felt towards the Lord was not a quiet emotion which they hid within themselves in the secret chamber of their souls, and which they only spake of in their private assemblies when they met on the first day of the week, and sang hymns in honour of Christ Jesus the crucified, but it was a passion with them of such a vehement and all-consuming energy, that it was visible in all their actions, spoke in their common talk, and looked out of their eyes even in their commonest glances.”

BURNED ITS WAY INTO THE OUTER MAN

“Love to Jesus was a flame which fed upon the core and heart of their being; and, therefore, from its own force burned its way into the outer man, and shone there. Zeal for the glory of King Jesus was the seal and mark of all genuine Christians. Because of their dependence upon Christ’s love they dared much, and because of their love to Christ they did much, and it is the same now. The children of God are ruled in their inmost powers by love – the love of Christ constraineth them; they rejoice that divine love is set upon them, they feel it shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto them, and then by force of gratitude they love the Saviour with a pure heart, fervently. My reader, do you love Him? Ere you sleep give an honest answer to a weighty question!”

C. H. Spurgeon.

THE LOVE OF GOD PERFECTED

“But who so keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him.” I John 2:5

PERFECT LOVE THAT CASTS OUT FEAR

“Not what I am, O Lord, but what Thou art:
That, that alone can be my soul’s true rest;
Thy love, not mine, bids fear and doubt depart,
And stills the tempest of my throbbing breast.
It is Thy perfect love that casts out fear;
I know the voice that speaks the ‘It is I’;
And in these well-known words of heavenly cheer
I hear the joy that bids each sorrow fly.
Thy name is Love! I hear it from yon cross;
Thy name is Love! I hear it from yon tomb;
All meaner love is perishable dross,
But this shall light me through time’s thickest gloom.
Girt with the love of God on every side,
Breathing that love as heaven’s own healing air,
I work or wait, still following my Guide,
Braving each foe, escaping every snare.”

'Tis what I know of Thee, my Lord and God,
That fills my soul with peace, my lips with song;
Thou art my health, my joy, my staff, and rod;
Leaning on Thee, in weakness I am strong.

More of Thyself, O show me hour by hour!
More of Thy glory – O my God and Lord!
More of Thyself, in all Thy grace and power;
More of Thy love and truth, Incarnate Word!"

H. Bonar.

Selected by Leonard Morgan.

MY BIBLE IS THE WORD OF GOD

The reasons for faith in the Bible as the word of God are more numerous and more convincing than for any other like object of man's faith.

My Bible claims to be the word of God. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." (II Tim. 3:16, AV). Of the sacred prophecy Peter said, "Men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit." (II Peter 1:21). Repeatedly, the Bible claims to be the "in-breathed" message of God to man. Justice and candour demand that this claim be honoured and investigated.

I believe the Bible is the word of God because many of its prophetic utterances have been corroborated by secular historians. The destruction of ancient Tyre is one of the many conspicuous examples. One has but to read Deuteronomy 28 and note the history of the Jew to see a remarkable and incontrovertible demonstration of the fulfilment of prophecy.

The spade of archaeology continues to bear cumulative and impressive testimony to the fact that my Bible is the word of God. Liberals long contended that there was no writing at the time of Moses. But the massive discoveries of Dr. Leonard Woolley in Ur of the Chaldees show an advanced civilization even in the days of Abraham. *Ancient history* was one of the subjects taught to children in the schools of Ur! From Babylonia, from Egypt, and from Palestine have come archaeological confirmation of such facts as the Egyptian bondage of the Israelites, the four kings of Genesis 14, the reign of Belshazzar as viceregent, and the destruction of such cities as Gibeah and Jericho. Sir Frederick Kenyon assures us that the Christian can take his Bible in his hand and confidently affirm that he has the word of God handed down and preserved through the centuries without essential loss or alteration.

I believe my Bible is the word of God because of the superabundance of its manuscripts (some 30,000 in whole or in part of the New Testament alone in all languages), and the painstaking and assiduous efforts of lower criticism in restoring the original text.

Reason to believe my Bible is the word of God is seen in its influence. It is not by accident that the people who love and hold to the basic freedoms, and the people whose culture and ideals have soared the highest are those among whom the Bible has enjoyed its widest circulation.

I confidently believe that my Bible is God's revelation because of its systematic unity. Where among the world's innumerable books is there to be found a composite volume authored by some forty men of widely varying backgrounds and traversing sixteen centuries that can offer such distinct unity as the Bible? With ease and characteristic beauty do the Books of the Bible fall into one complementary whole.

The Bible appeals to willing believers as the word of God because of its unspeakable moral excellence. Without hesitation I say that the standard set by the Lord Jesus will know no equal both in what He was and what He did.

I believe the Bible also because in it I find unequivocal answers to the fundamental questions that fall across the path of man's existence — from where did I come? Why am I here? What is the nature of my being? What about the hereafter? Doubtless, the Bible *raises* some difficult questions. But the Bible is remarkably more outstanding for the questions it *answers* than for the questions it *raises*.

I assuredly hold that the pragmatic worth of the Bible strenuously favours its being accepted as the word of God. Demonstration is an aggressive and relentless polemic. The Bible is practicable. It works!

I believe my Bible is the word of God because great minds through the centuries have attested to its uniqueness. The trailing lists honours such names as Milton, George Herbert, Isaak Walton, Isaac Newton, William Cowper, Walter Scott, Lord Macaulay, Thomas Carlyle, Judge Blackstone, William Wilberforce and George Peabody.

I believe my Bible is the very word of God because of its indestructibility. Kings, philosophers, pseudoscientists and atheists have expended every energy and device at their command in efforts to mortify the Bible. But the Bible rises from their feeble attacks “like a phoenix from the fire, as much unharmed as were Shadrach, Meshach and Abednigo” in the fiery furnace.

R. H. Lawrence.

GUIDES FOR GIVING

Money is only a means to an end. The question is — “To which end is it taking you?”

In my files is a clipping from a 1957 newspaper telling of a woman recluse in New York City who died of malnutrition in a dingy room. Police uncovered nearly a quarter of a million dollars in her bank accounts — and found that she had sealed the window cracks in her Staten Island apartment with dollar bills.

Jesus said “You cannot serve both God and Money” (Matthew 6:24). *Paul observed, “The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil” (1 Timothy 6:10). He added, “Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs” (v 10).

So when a writer discusses the topic of stewardship we should not take this as an attempt to “raise money,” but rather an effort to redeem men. Our giving to the Lord's work is not like paying dues at a club, nor trying to get a tax deduction, nor even securing “fire insurance.”

We give because He gave. He gave because He loved. Little wonder that one of every six verses in Matthew, Mark and Luke discusses the right handling of material goods. To the Lord, stewardship is inextricably intertwined with our relation to God.

Jesus warned, “Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions” (Luke 12:15). He reserved one of His strongest epithets (“You fool!”) for one who “stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God” (v. 21).

We cannot ignore the topic of stewardship by explaining, “We aren't wealthy.” A quick visit to the Third World — to say nothing of some of the poverty-stricken areas within the continental United States — will quickly correct that view. Moreover, as an unknown poet said,

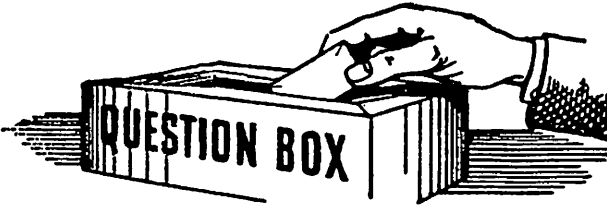
It's not what you do with millions,
If riches should be your lot,
But friend, what are you doing,
With the dollar and a quarter you've got?

Stewardship concerns everyone. A youngster who received a meager allowance has as much need to give to God as does the executive making a six-figure income. Do you give what the United Appeal calls, “Your Fair Share” to the work of the

Lord? The old saying is true: "You may give without loving, but you can't love without giving." Let us imitate the Macedonians. Paul described their generous giving, then added, "And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will" (2 Corinthians 8:5).

*Scripture quotations are from *The New International Version*.

(Sam E. Stone. "Christian Standard")



Conducted by
Alf Marsden

"If Satan has been defeated as the Bible teaches, why is it that there is so much evil in the world, and why does it seem to be getting worse?"

The defeat of Satan by Christ is very real and is the basis of Salvation. We must not, however, fall into the trap of thinking that because the power of Satan in death has been conquered, that Satan himself has been destroyed. Peter warns Christians, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8). Paul also warns Christians, "Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil" (Eph. 6:11). The reader should note that the Greek word **DIABOLOS** is one of the names of Satan. From this the English word 'Devil' is derived and should be applied only to Satan, as a proper name. The word **DAIMON** is frequently used but should be translated 'demon' and not 'devil'. There is one Devil (Satan) but there are many demons. We should also note that the exact **origin** of sin is not discussed in the Bible; we are presented with the **fact** that sin entered into the world by Satan, and that the association of evil with sin is always personified in Satan.

So what do we have on which to build our initial assessment, and from which we must draw our conclusions? Satan is still abroad in the world and, in fact, has much of the world in the bondage of sin. He is the **progenitor** of sin, and Paul reminds us that 'the sting of death is sin'; however, Jesus has conquered sin and death, and when we die in Him and become incorruptible and immortal then we shall experience the reality of the death and resurrection of Christ and the victory which these events accomplished, "Death is swallowed up in victory" (1 Cor. 15: 53-58). Furthermore, we Christians must believe – and teach – that if the power of good to **save** exists in the Person of the Christ of God, then with equal certainty we must assert that the power of evil to **destroy** exists in Satan. If we are to "overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:21), then we can be certain that what we have to overcome really exists.

The Human Condition

If we need convincing that all of us need conversion and regeneration then surely some remarks made by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount forcibly express the duality of the human condition, and imply that He thought of us all as having something evil and corrupt in our nature. He said to His listeners, "If ye, **being evil**, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good gifts to them that ask him" (Matt. 7:11).

Have you ever tried to analyse the human condition? It seems that we are an admixture of good and evil. Man cannot be **totally depraved** otherwise he could never respond to that which is good, i.e., he could never respond to the Gospel, or do any deed that could be classed as 'good'. We know, of course, that everything which God

created was good, but unfortunately His highest creation, man, became tainted with sin when Satan entered the Garden and Adam and Eve responded to his overtures (lies, in fact). Because of this, we know that man has within him the propensity to respond to evil and therefore in his condition he cannot be **totally good**; his ultimate end is death, both spiritual and physical. Spiritual death is the result of separation from God, the Source of life; this is why man needs **reconciliation** with God, and this was effected in Christ Jesus His Son when He died and rose again from the dead.

The Return to Life

I am referring, of course, to the God-life; that which was tragically taken away by Satan, but which can be joyously restored in Christ. Paul says that the word of reconciliation is contained in the Gospel, and that the Apostles – acting as ambassadors of God and Christ – were making the appeal directly to us, as he says, “We pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him (Christ) to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (Read 2 Cor. 5: 14-21. The One who knew no sin, of course, was Christ Himself). It is worth noting that God does not need to be reconciled to us; it is we who need to be reconciled to Him.

The return to life, therefore, is the return to the life-source; it is the return to the God-life. This life was extended to Jesus Himself; John records the words of Jesus, “For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given the Son to have life in Himself; and hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man” (John 5: 25-27). God sent the life of the God-head in His Son because He loved His fallen creation; as John says, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (3:16). This life is effective through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as proclaimed in the Gospel. On the Day of Pentecost Peter told his listeners what to do in order to gain this life, “Repent, and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).

On to Maturity

I have never been an advocate of the theory of the ‘divided Christian’; one who serves God with the spirit, and serves Satan with the flesh. This idea degrades the Holy Spirit who in-dwells the Christian. Paul in his Philippian letter speaks about growth, “Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing” (3:16). He is saying that if we have developed a certain maturity by following the dictates of the Holy Spirit, then let us **go on** applying the same spiritual principles until we reach **full** maturity. Surely this is his message to the Colossian Christians also, “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth” (Col. 3:1,2).

I have gone to this length to show that with the Divine help of the in-dwelling Holy Spirit the Christian **can** become Christlike. Peter says that the Christian has become “a partaker of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4), and surely it is a gross misrepresentation to say that Divine power **cannot** make a Christian eschew evil. Therefore, if it is true to say that Divine help can lead a Christian to spiritual maturity as a **human being**, then the reverse must also be true, i.e., that satanic influence can drag a non-Christian deeper and deeper into evildoing.

On To Degradation

You hardly need me to tell you that there is much evil in the world and that it seems to be getting worse. People are savagely attacked, defenceless babies are beaten, marauding gangs terrorise districts, aeroplanes are blown out of the sky by indiscriminate ‘bombers’, and so we could go on with an unending catalogue of evil. This

shouldn't surprise us because as we have said, Satan goes about as a roaring lion. Paul puts the human condition quite succinctly, "Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness" (Rom. 6:16). There are many people who are servants of Satan, and whether they realise it or not, they are yielding to his evil designs. The further they go along this road the more degraded they will become; that is inevitable. God is trying to **save** the world and to lead it in the paths of love, peace, compassion and forgiveness;) Satan is trying to **destroy** the world and lead it in the paths of hate, jealousy, war and final degradation. John Milton in his 'Paradise Lost' gives us a true picture of the satanic aspiration, for he has Satan saying, "To reign is worth ambition, though in hell: Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven" (Book 1 Page 8 Lines 20, 21). He **will** reign in hell, because that is the place prepared for him and his angels; the tragedy is that he will reign over many who are his servants on earth **now**, and who will be his subjects in hell.

So to our question. The battle has been joined and won by God and His Christ. But Satan is still loose and has dominion over many lives. That is why there is so much evil in the world. What does annoy me is that so many blame God for this. That we must never do.

(All questions, please, to:

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MISSION POWER

I don't believe that Jesus ever commands us to do the impossible. For this reason we believe that, for the church to fulfil its mandate of preaching the gospel to the whole creation, is a "mission possible." In this article we want to emphasize that Jesus did not command us to baptize "all people", but to "baptize all believers."

Exercising ourselves in preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ is "evangelism". When the term is mentioned, our minds may and often do, shift to programmes – Bible Call, Cable T.V., busing, highly emotional preaching. All these and more have their place, and often may contribute. However, it seems that effective evangelism is more than programmes.

In his book "sharpening the Focus of the Church," Gene Getz makes a point which is worthy of consideration. He suggests that the great commission implies a natural order. First, going and making disciples as you go. Then, baptizing them. Then, teaching them to hold fast to the commitment to Christ they have made in baptism.

I think those who are up-and-about in our "world" of Canada, would agree that "making disciples" is the great challenge. When this is accomplished, then conversion usually follows.

Behold the Sower

Perhaps there is something for us to relearn in "making disciples" from the ancient but familiar parable of Jesus recorded in Matthew 13:3-9, the interpretation being given by Jesus Himself in Matthew 13:18-23. There are a few points here, either directly explained or indirectly implied, we would like to note. First, Jesus titled it "the parable of the sower". While some would suggest it could be called the parable of the soils, perhaps this liberty is permissible, yet Jesus seemed to place the emphasis on the "sower". Maybe His reason for doing so was that He knew in a short time He and His disciples would be facing cruel and unfair opposition. Jesus was prepared for it, but His disciples were not. The temptation for them would be to withdraw from actively proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom. With this parable Jesus is emphasizing their need to continue sowing the seed of the kingdom even when few hearts were receptive.

I think we need this same encouragement today. As I survey our nation, where only one in four thousand is a member of the body of Christ, I am, at times, overwhelmed by the sheer size of the "field" in which the seed is to be sown. As I think of all the language and cultural barriers of our "world in miniature", I am tempted to give up in despair.

Maybe the problem is seeing the "whole world" of Canada, and not seeing the smaller field which immediately surrounds me? The immediate task to which I am called is to sow the seed, "make disciples", in the smaller field surrounding me at the moment. If each of us in our own separate field earnestly sows the seed, then will not the whole field of our nation be implanted with the gospel much sooner than later?

Preparing The Soil

There is, I suggest, another implied fact in the parable of the sower. I have never been to Palestine to observe the agricultural methodology, but I have a bit of understanding regarding agricultural methods in Ontario. In our Province, the soil of a field has to be prepared before it is seeded. The soil in most parts is such it has to be "worked" before planting takes place.

May I suggest that the same is true of human hearts? Much preparing of the soil of hearts makes the sowing of the seed reap a richer harvest. Loving one's neighbour may not mean manipulating them into an immediate teaching situation. It may mean befriending them, gaining their confidence, showing them you are a human being, but at the same time that you have spiritual resources at your disposal, and a sense of ultimate purpose which gives meaning to life with all its difficulties.

Not long ago a family in our community called, asking for an appointment. They were facing a "stiff test" and did not know just where to turn. When we visited them, their opening remarks were, "We are friends of a family who go to your church. We have noticed for some time now they have something in their relationship we don't have. We talked to them, and they suggested we talk to you". These Christian friends had influenced the soil so well that sowing the seed was joyful simplicity, and the yield was one-hundred fold.

The Function Of All

This leads me to believe that evangelism, if it is to be truly effective, is not the task of "professionals". It is the result of whole body function. And the evangelistic function of some may be quite different to the function of others. Paul certainly subscribed to this fact in 1 Cor. 12. If we think of "teaching evangelists" (i.e. those engaged in 'cottage meetings', preaching from the pulpits, etc) as the "eyes" or "ears" of a congregation, we know that by themselves they are not the church on behalf of the church. The functioning body is a 'whole body', and for evangelism to be effective, this is essential.

The fact is that some Christians are not equipped by the Spirit to teach verbally and should not be made to feel guilty because that is the case. Is evangelism always a verbal teaching? Is not "preparing the soil" also part of the entire process?

Perhaps as congregations we need to exercise ourselves in self-examination; see ourselves collectively as a total body, created and gifted by the Lord for encouraging and building up one another and witnessing about Jesus in our immediate field, thus discovering and enlarging our individual abilities by practice. Maybe our greatest challenge is making the "great commission" a "Mission Possible", is to retain the very special friendships which are within the body, all the while extending our abilities to befriend into the immediate field surrounding us. In times past I think it was called "Neighbourliness"? I believe that, by trusting prayer and genuine "neighbouring", the Lord will lead us to a teaching situation with new friends.

Don't Write Off The Field

One final point is this. Sometimes though the soil is carefully prepared, when the seed is planted no crop is forthcoming. Nature seems to conspire against the sower, no matter what! You know the sower doesn't write off that field forever. Maybe the next year, with the same methods employed, the same field will produce abundantly.

I know of a family whom a preacher visited faithfully for seven years, but never got past the front door. Then one day he was invited in. Six months later the wife and mother was baptized, and within a year the husband and three children also became Christians. How do we explain this? I prefer to think that the Lord was behind it all, and am content to accept this.

In the meantime other fields, which in the past have been unproductive, are still being tilled. Who knows when the crop may flourish. The thrilling challenge is — the fields are all around us, and the Lord is pleading with us to prepare the soil. In His time and way, **He will** increase the crop.

M. Smith, Ontario.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Mar. 5	Isaiah 35	Mark 7: 24-37
Mar. 12	Ex. 16: 1-18	Mark 8: 1-21
Mar. 19	Isaiah 53	Mark 8: 22 to 9:1
Mar. 26	Dan. 7: 1-14	Mark 9: 2-13

A Syrophenician Woman

There were many divisions in the world in which Jesus lived. One of them was between Jew and Gentile. One writer has commented: "There was no more hated people than the Jews. Their separatism and their isolation and their contempt of other nations gained them hostility. It was, in fact, believed that a basic part of their religion was an oath that they would never in any circumstances give help to a Gentile, even to the extent of giving him directions if he asked the way. Their observance of the Sabbath gained them a reputation for laziness, their refusal of swine's flesh gained them mockery, even to the extent of the rumour that they worshipped the pig as their God. Anti-Semitism was a real and universal force in the ancient world." William Barclay has written: "The Jew had an immense contempt for the Gentile. They said that the Gentiles were created by God to be fuel for the fires of Hell; that God loved only Israel of all the nations that he had made; that the best of the serpents crushed, the best of the Gentiles killed. It was not even

lawful to render help to a Gentile woman in child birth, for that would be to bring another Gentile into the world. The barrier between Jew and Gentile was absolute. If a Jew married a Gentile, the funeral of that Jew was carried out. Such contact with a Gentile was the equivalent of death: even to go into a Gentile house rendered a Jew unclean." This division should be kept in mind as we read Jesus' encounter with the Syrophenician or Gentile woman.

Another point I should like to make here is this. The term "dog" was one of contempt in that day. In fact, it was used by the Jews of the Gentiles. However, it appears that Jesus on this occasion did not use the usual word, but a diminutive word which described, not the wild dogs of the streets, but the little lap-dogs of the house. In short, He took the sting out of the word.

A Deaf Man And A Blind Man Healed

We read of the healing of the deaf man and the blind man in 7:31-37 and 8:22-26. I have been told that complete deafness is worse than complete blindness. It is difficult to comment on that; only to say that, as far as I am concerned, blindness would be the worst affliction to strike me. I read so much that I would desperately miss dipping into my library as frequently as I do.

The blind have my deepest sympathy. One of the most interesting encounters I ever had was with two blind

men in the British Museum in London. They confided in me all about their difficulties. Lack of privacy was a major drawback with them. Normal mail, for example, had to be read out by neighbours or friends, and this they deplored greatly.

We cannot imagine the joy that these two men felt on being healed by Jesus. Surely it proved to them that this man Jesus of Nazareth was none other than the promised Messiah, the Son of the Living God.

Warning against the Doctrine of the Pharisees

I immediately recall the fact that the apostle Paul was once a Pharisee (Philippians 3:5). But who were the Pharisees and what did they teach?

“The Pharisees are first mentioned as a distinct group under the high priest Jonathan (160-143 B.C.). Unlike the Essenes, who looked for a kingdom of the new age, the Pharisees were willing to make compromises in order to survive as a distinct group. For this they were branded ‘hypocrites’ by the Essenes. On the other hand, as the Pharisees firmly believed in the resurrection, they clashed with the Sadducees. They held that ‘he that says there is no resurrection of the dead has no share in the world to come.’ The Sadducees were mainly priests, concerned with the temple worship practices; the Pharisees were primarily scribes who interpreted the scriptures according to the oral law, which they held was as ancient as the written Law. Their concern in interpreting the Law (the *Torah*) was first of all to apply the eternal Law to the changing circumstances of their day, by means of elaborate arguments. Secondly, they sought to ‘make a hedge about the Law’, that is to take added precautions to prevent the breaking of the Law ... It was this punctilious zeal for the letter of the Law which was condemned by Jesus as hypocrisy” (Edwin Yamauchi).

The Pharisees tempted Jesus (8:11). but He, of course, knew everything in their hearts and could, therefore, deal

with them effectively. They sought from Him “a sign from heaven” (8:11). He said: “There shall no sign be given unto this generation” (8:12). Kenneth S. Wuest has written: “In Mark, we have an absolute refusal of a sign. In Matthew, the refusal is qualified by the offer of the miracle of the resurrection (the sign of Jonah). But the latter was an absolute refusal of a sign in the sense that the Pharisees and Sadducees conceived of a sign. They later refused to be convinced after He had arisen from the dead”. (Acts 3-5).

Jesus – The Christ

The Jews had difficulty in working out who Jesus of Nazareth really was. He was obviously such a great teacher and performer of miracles that He had to be someone special like John the Baptist, Elijah, or one of the prophets (8:28). But in response to His question to the disciples: “Who do you say that I am?” Peter replied: “You are the Christ.” (8:29).

Alexander Campbell in his book *The Christian System* has important things to say under the title *The Christian Confession of Faith*. He wrote: “The only apostolic and divine confession of faith which God, the Father of all, has laid for the church – and that on which Jesus Himself said he would build it, is the sublime and supreme proposition: THAT JESUS OF NAZARETH IS THE MESSIAH, THE SON OF THE LIVING GOD. This is the peculiarity of the Christian system: its specific attribute ... This confession of faith has in it two distinct ideas – the one concerning the person, the other concerning the office, of the Son of Man. The one asserts His divine relations, the other His official rank and glory. No one can intelligently believe this proposition and not turn to God with all his heart: for there is in it a thousand thoughts and motives to bind the soul to God, and melt it into the most affectionate devotion. There is also in it the strongest bond to secure the affections of all Christians to one another. There is no other confession of

faith on which the church can be built, on which it can possibly stand one and undivided, but on this one."

Discipleship

A command by Jesus to his apostles was: "Go you, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matthew 28:19-20). A disciple of Jesus is simply a follower of Jesus. Discipleship involves the denial of self – losing one's life for the Master and His gospel (8:34,35). Discipleship is declaring to the Master: "My Lord, my Life, my All!"

The Transfiguration

The verb "transfigured" is from the Greek word *metamorphoo* (hence our English word metamorphosis), which means to change into another form. Mark wrote: "And his raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow, so as no fuller on earth can white them" (9:3). Moses and Elijah (Greek Elias) appeared at this time. Adam Clarke in his commentary has pointed out that "it was a constant and prevalent tradition among the Jews, that both Moses and Elijah should appear in the times of the Messiah."

The voice from the cloud is important. It said: "This is my beloved Son, hear Him" (9:7). Jesus now had the pre-eminence. "God ... has in these last days spoken unto us by His Son" (Hebrews 1:2).

Ian S. Davidson, Motherwell.

SERMON ILLUSTRATION

With matter divine and manner human, our Lord descended to the level of the humblest of the crowd, lowering Himself to their understandings, and winning His way into their hearts by borrowing His topics from familiar circumstances and the scenes around Him. Be it a boat, a plank, a rope, a beggar's rags, an imperial robe, we would seize

on anything to save a drowning man; and in His anxiety to save poor sinners, to rouse their fears, their love, their interest, to make them understand and feel the truth, our Lord pressed everything – art and nature, earth and heaven – into His service. Creatures of habit, the servants if not the slaves of form, we invariably select our text from some book of the Sacred Scriptures. He took a wider, freer range; and, instead of keeping to the unvarying routine of text and sermon with formal divisions, it were well, perhaps, that we sometimes ventured to follow His example; for may it not be to the naturalness of their addresses and their striking out from the beaten path of texts and sermons, to their plain speaking and home-thrusts, to their direct appeals and homespun arguments, that our street and lay preachers owe perhaps not a little of their power?

Illustrating the word of the great English dramatist –

"Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,
Sermons in stones, and good in everything."

our Lord found many a topic of discourse in the scenes around Him; even the humblest objects shone in His hands, as I have seen a fragment of broken glass or earthenware, as it caught the sun-beam, light up, flashing like a diamond. With the stone of Jacob's Well for a pulpit, and its water for a text, He preached salvation to the Samaritan woman. A little child, which He takes from its mother's side, and holds up blushing in His arms before the astonished audience, is His text for a sermon on humility. A husbandman on a neighbouring height between him and the sky, who strides with long and measured steps over the field he sows, supplies a text from which He discourses on the gospel and its effects on different classes of hearers. In a woman baking; in two women who sit by some cottage door grinding at the mill; in an old, strong fortalice perched on a rock, whence it looks across the brawling torrent to the ruined and roofless gable of a house

swept away by mountain floods – Jesus found texts. From the birds that sung above His head, and the lilies that blossomed at His feet, He discoursed on the care of God – these His text and Providence His theme.

– *Guthrie.*

OBITUARY

Dalmellington: Again the last enemy death has made itself felt among us. On 28th December 1988, after a long illness, our beloved sister Nan Chalmers fell asleep in Jesus in her 71st year. She had been a faithful sister in Christ for many years, she was a consistent attendee at all the meetings, even when in great bodily weakness, her home was ever open to God’s children; it could be rightly said that Nan was given to much hospitality. For the many years I have known Nan she was a model for every Christian woman to follow, both as a mother and as a sister in Christ. Our sympathy and prayers are with Bro. David and family at this time. May the Lord guide and keep them until that time when He comes to gather up his jewels.

A short service was conducted by the writer in the meeting place and at the graveside, which was attended by a number of brethren, relatives and friends. Bro. Jack Nisbet very suitably closed this solemn occasion by prayer. Bro. Chalmers wishes to thank all who attended the service and all those who phoned or sent cards and letters at this sad time.

James Sinclair.

Motherwell: It is with deep sorrow that we report the passing of our much loved sister Amy Davidson on Thursday 5th January, 1989, at the age of 70. Amy, the wife of Hugh Davidson, was baptised in 1935 and through her long Christian life remained a credit to the Church, faithful in attendance, and faithful in being a fine example to all her brethren. Amy was well known for her hospitality which was enjoyed by many throughout the years. She will be missed by all. We commend her loved ones, and all others who mourn her passing, to our Heavenly

Father’s care. The Funeral Service, on Tuesday, 10th January, was conducted by Bro. Jack Nisbet with help from Bro. Jim Sinclair.

W. J. Purcell (Sec.).

NEWS FROM THE CHURCHES

Slamannan District: The Quarterly Mutual Benefit Meeting took place at Brightons on Saturday, 10th December when the following subject was discussed “What is meant by Titus 2:5 that women should be ‘Keepers at home?’” John Wilson from Newtongrange chaired the meeting and the speakers were Jim Sinclair (Snr.) and Mark Plain, both Tranent. The usual period of discussion followed the speakers and an enjoyable and instructive meeting was had. The next Meeting is due to be held in Motherwell, and will take place, God willing, on March 11th at 4 p.m. when the chairman will be Graeme Pearson, Dunfermline, and the speakers Harry McGinn, from Dalmellington; and James R. Gardiner, from Haddington. The subject will be “Can a Christian be a member of a Trade Union or a Free Mason’s Lodge.?”

Biliwili Village, Mwanza, Malawi: I came here in 1975, from Zomba District and we had only 2 places for worship. Now we have more than 20 Prayer Houses and the work is progressing well. Please pray for us here in Malawi.

J.R. Pondani.

Zomba, Malawi: The work of the Lord makes good progress here. We have 54 church buildings here in the Southern and Central regions of the country. We have 14 evangelists and a number of our churches are being cared for by church elders. During the month of October 85 people were baptised at the following places:-

Thabwani	27
Makhasu	23
Kathebwe	15
Chikala	13
Chisuzi	7

Our Namiwawa Church Building was hit by a cyclone in 1985 and the roof badly damaged. The work on repairs is in motion.

W.F. Khonde, Sec.

Newtongrange: On the 15th December last, the ladies of the womens meeting enjoyed a fine time of fellowship and praise. The occasion for the gathering, was their end of session social. Sister E. Jess conducted the meeting. During the evening solo recitals were rendered by Sister G. Coventry, Mrs. Smith and Mrs. McIntyre. Viz "Only in Thee" "It is no secret" and one so old, that we have forgotten the name of it. Likewise we all enjoyed the meal provided. It was noted that Sister N. Wilson was able to attend after her recent illness. Sister Wilson wishes to take the opportunity to thank all church members, friends and ladies of the meeting for the kind wishes and cards received.

The climax of the meeting was the tasting delights of a "cloutie" dumpling and cream. After the evening drew to a close the ladies were "whisked" home in a mini bus provided by Bro. Wilson.

Verdict...a most enjoyable evening.

A.P. Sharp, Sec.

Kirkcaldy: Brother Alex Lowrie was restored to fellowship on 1st January, 1989. May God bless Alex, Betty and family in 1989.

Ruth Moyes.

COMING EVENTS

Newtongrange : Study on the Church. Illustrated by Slides by Ian Davidson. Saturday, 25th February, 1989 at 7.00 p.m. Try and be with us.

Kirkcaldy : Annual Social on 8th April, 1989 at 3.30 p.m. Speaker Graeme Pearson.

Tranent : Annual Social on 18th March, 1989 at 4.00 p.m. at Loch Centre. Chairman : Mark Plain (Snr.). Speakers : Jack Nisbet (Haddington), David Ferguson (Mayfield). All Welcome.

THANKS

All those who contribute to the production and distribution of the "S.S." still do so voluntarily and completely unpaid. This is the time of year when subscriptions are received accompanied with little comments from readers. We thank all those who have written, and are glad to hear that the paper is appreciated and enjoyed. We also certainly apologise to any reader who may have been offended or outraged by anything said. The columns are ever open for free expression by any subscriber, who wishes to teach or exhort his brethren: an opportunity not offered by many church magazines. We welcome our new readers and thank all those who remitted in excess of the cost of subscription so that the paper might also go to those in the Third World.

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:

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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