

The SCRIPTURE STANDARD

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

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NOT FAR FROM THE KINGDOM

During a conversation with a Scribe Jesus revealed that there are people in this world who are **not far from** the kingdom of heaven. The Scribe had asked a question hoping to trap and discredit Jesus, but was so impressed with Christ's reply, that he was quick to admit that he had been won over by the obvious wisdom of the answer. Jesus warmed to the integrity of the man and said, "**Thou art not far from the Kingdom of God.**" (Mark 12:32). The Scribe had been perceptive enough to recognise the truth when he saw it, and honourable enough to admit it. There is hope for all such; of entering the kingdom of God.

This remark of Jesus that the man was 'not far' from the kingdom indicates, of course, that neither was the man in the kingdom. He was not far from it but **certainly not in it**. This suggests, surely, that there is a **set demarcation line** which must be crossed ere we can enter God's kingdom. Jesus could just as easily have said, "Glad to see you in the kingdom" but He didn't. Clearly the Scribe had an attitude of mind necessary to entry, but had not yet crossed the boundary line. Paul could say to the Christians at Colosse that "**they had been delivered from the power of darkness and had been translated (transferred or transported) into the Kingdom of God's dear Son.**" (Col.1:13) They had crossed the line from the camp of Satan into the kingdom of Christ. **How far away was the Scribe?** We cannot tell but Jesus said he was 'Not far'.

There must be countless thousands of fine men and women who live and die in a state similar to that of the Scribe's: i.e. not far from, but not in, the kingdom of God. There must be countless thousands of good people, who, with a little encouragement and knowledge, would readily enter the kingdom: but the problem seems to be in reaching them. It surely must be a profitable exercise for us to identify and contemplate the reasons why men and women shy away from crossing the threshold. Some, I suppose, feel that they are quite as good (and in some cases much better) than the average church-goer and feel, therefore, that, effectually, they are already in the kingdom. Some feel, no doubt, that living the 'Christian' life would be much too difficult and they hope to throw themselves upon God's mercy on Judgement Day. Apart from those 'too good' and those 'too bad', there are those who, through foolish pride, fear what family and friends might say. There are those bewildered by the many discordant voices of the religious world, and not knowing what to believe, end up suspicious of all sects and denominations. There are also those who are completely 'turned off' by religious division: and those completely indifferent to any suggestion that they ought to change their present life-style. There may also be many who think that living a 'decent' life is equal to being in God's kingdom: and those who would

enter but they don't know how. In the hope that this magazine may be read by someone described above (i.e. not far from the kingdom) I offer the following remarks on the modus operandi of crossing the boundary line into the Kingdom of God.

DESIRE

Firstly, a very strong desire to enter must be present. This may seem self-evident but if such a desire is not present in some strength, all that follows will be flawed. The attitude of the penitent must be, **"Speak Lord, for thy servant heareth"** and we must regard God as the potter and we the clay. We must also be prepared to enter the kingdom **on God's terms** and not seek to enter on our own conditions. These terms are set in concrete in the New Testament and have been non-negotiable for the last 2,000 years. Christ is the appointed Lawgiver and we must acknowledge Him in all things, with humility and great deference. He who wishes to stipulate his own conditions of entry into the kingdom will never enter, but manifests an attitude quite unlike the Scribe's, and distances himself from the possibility of ever gaining admittance.

Likewise, the desire must be genuine and solely motivated by an eagerness to become a servant of Christ. It is not unknown for some to 'join the church' to please parents, to appear respectable to employers, or to reach some member of the opposite sex in the congregation. It is also not unknown for some parents to threaten to drop beneficiaries from their last Will and Testament, unless such beneficiaries become members of the church.

FAITH

The rich usually have access to all the best things in life, but we can thank God that, in this question, the abjectly poor have as ready access to the kingdom as any others. All that is required is a true and very strong belief in God. **"He that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him."** (Heb. 11:6). **"Without faith it is impossible to please God."** The poor victims of the Slave Trade were subjected to great poverty, and cruelty in the cotton fields, yet God's praise was ever on their lips and their faith in God was an inspiration to us all. Many Jews, of course, believed in God but that was not enough. Jesus said, **"Ye believe in God, believe also in Me."** We must not only believe in the only true and living God, but we must also confess that Christ is His only Son and our Saviour. John 3:16 is a very well known passage of scripture but the verses which follow are equally important, **"For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world: but that the world through Him might be saved. He that believeth on Him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. (v.17,18)**

From this it surely follows that atheists and all sceptics, who remain in that condition, have no prospects of entering the kingdom. Active faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is absolutely prerequisite. Indeed it is so vital that Jesus Himself said that those who do not believe on the Son are **condemned already**: condemned even now, before the Judgement.

"Ye believe in God: believe also in Me."

REPENTANCE

To cross the borderline between the realms of Satan and the Kingdom of Christ requires, quite obviously, that we leave our 'past' behind and mend our ways accordingly. We can't expect to behave in the kingdom of God as we did in the service of the devil. We cannot serve God and Mammon. In short, we must revise our former life-style and repent of our previous mode of conduct.

This is surely not a mystery, but plain common sense. A great deal has been written about 'repentance' but perhaps the best and shortest definition of the term was given in Christ's instructions to the woman taken in adultery, **"Go and sin no**

more". John The Baptist administered the "baptism of repentance" and those who thronged to receive his baptism were required to confess their sins and to show some evidence of contrition. This did not deter the multitudes who were 'not far' from the kingdom and they came in their thousands: including the whole city of Jerusalem, Judea and the entire region round about Jordan. Such was their consuming desire to enter the kingdom that they were more than happy to hike the many miles to where John was, and then to search for him in the wilderness and the desert. This illustrates, perhaps, the intensity of their desire to enter, and is worth noting.

To those who enquired of John as to what form their repentance should take (for they already believed in God), and what would constitute evidence of such repentance, John suggested that he who had two coats should give one to him who had none. Likewise he who had a surplus of bread should give to those who had none. The Publicans received the charge that they should only exact the correct amount of taxation from the people. The soldiers were instructed to do violence to no man; neither to make any false charges against any. (Luke 3:10-14). Thus, those intent upon entering the kingdom had to change from being selfish, and self-centred, to being liberal with belongings: sharing their bread and their possessions. Those, like the Publicans, whose stock-in-trade was deceit and falsehood had to revert to honesty and fair trading. And those, like the soldiers, who were men of violence, had to espouse gentleness and fairness in all their dealings. There must be few indeed who cannot see the sense in 'repentance'. The kingdom of God was no place for violence, cruelty, robbery, villainy or roguery. All these things had to be left behind in the kingdom of darkness. And Peter reminds us that we must not return to these things (2 Peter 2:22) as the dog returns to its vomit, and the sow that was washed to its wallowing in the mire.

BAPTISM

Entry into the kingdom is marked by a **conscious act** which declares to the world that we have crossed the boundary-line: i.e. our immersion in the waters of baptism. It is not only necessary that the future life-style must improve: but also that the sins of the former mode of life be dealt with and erased. We have blotted our copy-books and must start afresh with a new page. We must wipe the slate clean and start afresh. Christ came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. The blood of Christ can cleanse all types and forms of sin, and a man cannot be too deeply-dyed in sin to enter the kingdom. The dregs of humanity entered (and still enter) the kingdom and this included robbers, murderers, thieves, prostitutes, homosexuals, liars and the like, and all had to be **washed clean**, to start life afresh, as guiltless as new-born babes. How can such a marvellous change be accomplished? How can such a thing be possible?

It not only can be accomplished but is **accomplished** by the power of God, the blood of Christ, and by the baptism of the penitent in the watery grave. Even Paul himself, as he agonised over the enormity of his sins (especially against the Christians) was instructed by Ananias to "**Arise and be baptised, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord**". (Acts 22:16). The apostle Peter called upon those who had murdered the Christ to "**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**". The abrogation of our sins, and the gift of the Spirit, fall to us upon our willing submission to the holy ordinance of baptism. This is the 'new birth' spoken of by Jesus when He said, "**Ye must be born again. Except a man be born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.**" (John 3:5) And so we must all be reborn in a spiritual sense: of water and the spirit. Paul reminded the Christians at Corinth that evil men will not inherit the kingdom of heaven and adds, "**And such were some of you: but ye are washed: but ye are sanctified: but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus**". (1 Cor, 6:9-11). And so, by the grace and power of God, it is easily possible to wash

away our sins, by baptism, no matter how degenerate and evil we may have become. Few can have been as wicked as the Christians at Corinth and yet Paul says that they had been washed clean; and had thereby been sanctified and justified.

In effect, before we can enter the kingdom of God we **must have a bath**: not for the cleansing of the physical body but the soul. Very few of the thousands who were baptised in the Jordan came out of the water with clean bodies, for the river was muddy and dirty, but their souls had been cleansed whiter than white, clean and bright, and they came forth as innocent as the newly-born. Paul calls baptism **“the bath of regeneration”** and says to Titus (3:5) **“Not by the works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy God saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.”** “Washing” is from the Greek *loutron* (and occurs only twice in N.T.) and means “a laver or a bath”. “Regeneration” also occurs only twice: (here and Matt. 19:28) and is from the Greek *paligge* which means “a recreation, rebirth or regeneration”. Thus “the washing of regeneration” literally means **“the bath of rebirth”**. This is indeed how MacKnight renders it and applies it to baptism (as indeed do all Bible scholars of any repute).

And so, in order to enter the kingdom of God we must cancel out all our unrighteousness of the past, and wash away our sins in the waters of holy baptism. We must be immersed in the ‘bath of regeneration’ and be ‘born again’ (of water and the Spirit) and emerge from the watery grave to walk in newness of life. (see also Rom. 6). Sadly, this wonderful and priceless offer, from a benevolent and gracious God goes largely unheeded, and thousands upon thousands die in their sins.

ALMOST OR ALTOGETHER

Jesus commended the attitude of the Scribe and suggested that he was “Not far from the kingdom.” We don’t know **how far** away he was but he was “not far”. We hear no more about the Scribe and so we don’t know whether he entered the kingdom or not. It may well be that he died in a state of being ‘not far’ from but not actually in, the church. Tragically, many fine people are in a similar situation: not far from, but not in, the kingdom and who die in that condition. That should worry us. Bengel says, “If thou art not far from the kingdom then enter it: otherwise it were better if thou wert afar off” and I suppose this is very true if we think about it. There is really no merit in being ‘not far’ from the kingdom if we never enter it: we would be as well to be miles from it. In like manner, I suppose, when Paul had preached the gospel to King Agrippa, the king said, **“Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian”**. “Almost” is not good enough and, of course, avails nothing. Those who are almost Christians will almost be saved and will almost go to heaven. As the hymnwriter expressed it:—

“Almost persuaded” now to believe,
 “Almost persuaded” Christ to receive,
 Almost, can not avail;
 Almost, is but to fail:
 Sad, Sad, the bitter wail,
 “Almost” but lost.

Paul’s reply to the king was **“I would to God, that not only thou, but all that hear me this day, were both almost and altogether such as I am ...”** Not almost a Christian but altogether one. This was Paul’s wish and prayer. May God bless and help all those in the ‘not far’ category to have the strength and wisdom to take that decisive step over the boundary line; leave the service of Satan and be translated, or transported, into the Kingdom of God’s dear Son.

GLEANINGS

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

Lift Up Your Eyes

"Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest."

A Channel of Blessing

"Is your life a channel of blessing? Is the love of God flowing thro' you? Are you telling the lost of the Saviour? Are you ready His service to do?"

Is your life a channel of blessing? Are you burden'd for those that are lost? Have you urged upon those who are straying, the Saviour who died on the Cross?

Is your life a channel of blessing? Is it daily telling for Him?

Have you spoken the Word of salvation, To those who are dying of sin?

We cannot be channels of blessing, If our lives are not free from all sin;

We will barriers be and a hindrance, To those we are trying to win.

Chorus:— Make me a channel of blessing today!

Make me a channel of blessing, I pray!

My life possessing, my service blessing,

Make me a channel of blessing today!

(Redemption Songs 344)

Elijah

"The Divine action in thus sending Elijah was arresting. All earthly authority and protection were swept aside as being unnecessary. In simplest ways God protected His messenger, and provided for him. Thus God does break in upon human affairs, and assert Himself ever and anon, by some messenger. Men may refuse the message, and persecute the messenger; but the word he speaks is the word of Jehovah, and it is the word by which men live or die according to their response to it."

Arise and Eat

"The story of Elijah is very human, and appeals to us because it is so true to the experience of life. The account of his encounter with the prophets of Baal is full of majesty. With calm dignity he stood against the combined evils of a corrupt court and a pagan religion. His vindication by the fire of God was perfect. The slaughter of the prophets of Baal aroused the ire of Jezabel to such a degree, that she sent a direct message, full of fury, to Elijah, then came reaction. The man who had stood erect, confronting all the forces of evil, now fled for his life."

The Story of God's Method

"Full of beauty is the story of God's method with His over-wrought and fearful servant. Before entering into that communion with him which was for the correction of his false attitude of fear, He commanded him to eat, thus ministering to his physical weakness. The words which are suggested by the story are those of the psalmist: **"He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust."** How often the way to spiritual strength and mental restoration is that of physical renewal!

A Wonderful, understanding God is ours!

"While we are serving our King in this sphere of earth there can be no divorce between physical and spiritual health. Over and over again, the breakdown of spiritual vision is the result of physical weariness. Let us never forget that the word of Jehovah to His servant of old under these conditions was, first: **"Arise and eat."** He had much to say to Elijah afterwards, and much to reveal to him; but He prepared him by renewing his bodily strength. A wonderful, understanding God is ours!"

Campbell Morgan.

Little

“Little drops of water, little grains of sand,
 Make the mighty ocean and the beauteous land.
 Little deeds of kindness, little words of love,
 Make our earth an Eden, like the heaven above.
 Little deeds of mercy, sown by eager hands,
 Grow to bless the nations far in heathen lands.”

C. G.

The Seed Shall Surely Grow

“Lord, if at Thy command the Word of life we sow,
 Watered by Thy Almighty hand, the seed shall surely grow.”

C. G.

Selected by Leonard Morgan.

THANK GOD FOR THE GIFT OF REPENTANCE

It is the constant need for repentance that always calls us to sorrow and beginning again. The change may have been more marked when we came to baptism and adopted the new life style. But the process continues for a lifetime. Repentance is not always a pleasant word. To some “sophisticated” Christians the term brings a faint smile, as they think of “old fashioned ideas” they have outgrown. It may suggest hellfire preaching to others. Some think of a scowling deity, shaking his finger, and forbidding whatever seems enjoyable. To many it is a term of negative connotation, and best not discussed.

But like so many biblical terms that we try to avoid, the reality of self-examination, sorrow, and change persists, no matter how we react to the word that describes the situation. Yet there is certainly a positive way to look at repentance, and to count it a blessing. Hence, the title, “Thank God for the Gift of Repentance.”

Think of it this way. Our Creator has plans for us, in which he would give us a glory and happiness infinitely transcending our feeble plans for our own lives. Yet in giving us free choice, he has endured the heartbreak of seeing us reject our true destiny, to settle for worthlessness. He will not give up on us, as the cross says so inescapably. He made us for himself, and will do all that can be done, aside from forcing us against our will, to enable us to enjoy that divine fellowship. What human can understand the divine agony that must occur when the crown of earthly creation – man – so wilfully rejects the beauty of what could be. Still the divine voice calls. It calls to the world, and it calls to Christians. It comes with tones of love, imploring us to pursue the path to genuine fulfilment and unassailable joy. The call to repent is not a monster to whip us into line, but a passionately concerned Father hoping he can get us to see the truth and catch the vision of what he made us to be.

Endless Grace

Within this broad framework, we can discern the following reasons to thank God for the gift of repentance. It tells us, when sin has sullied our lives, that God’s response is continued love, the offer of forgiveness, and assistance to improvement. He does not, in irritation, slam the iron door upon us when we have disobeyed him, shutting us up inescapably in the prison of our own wrongdoing. It is not eternal exclusion from his presence, but the concerned voice addressing us yet one more time, healing, lifting, urging us on allowing us to know he still cares. Repentance says to us that God always offers, while there is life, another chance. We never irritate him so finally that he, in disgust, gives up on us. Especially when we have become enmeshed in some great transgression that poisons our whole lives, and with which we engage in

terrible struggle, are we grateful for the gift of repentance. How could he still love us? Yet wonder of wonders, he does. The eternal Friend is present. Despite our agony of guilt, there is still hope for such as us.

Furthermore, the gift of repentance reminds us that we were made for something higher than we have presently attained. There is always the upward call. Though it is not a burden impossible to bear, yet the constant invitation to repent ever suggests our frailty, and reminds us never to be satisfied with our imperfect selves. In connection with this, God gives us the gift of guilt, which is his warning signal of a malfunction, and the spur to re-evaluation and change. He does not want us to suffer from guilt feelings where there is no genuine guilt, for that is to insult his forgiveness. Nor does he wish it to be a punishment to make life continually miserable. It is always understood in connection with his grace, so that guilt is not the last word. Rather the divine forgiveness is. But this inner dissatisfaction opens within us the desire for something better, and to this desire God constantly responds.

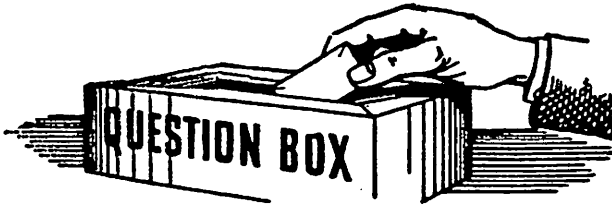
Introspection

Finally, the gift of repentance confers the blessing of self-evaluation. Only by being willing to see what we are is there the possibility for improvement and growth. The most pathetic figures in the gospels are those self-righteous souls whom Jesus so often depicted as insensitive to instruction, because they were so complacent in their spiritual status quo. Were it not for the call to repent we would be lost in the stagnant marsh of self-satisfaction. Contrariwise, when we are sensitized to our real selves, great changes can take place. We come to know our-selves because of this call, in a way that opens new possibilities for spiritual progress. We come to discern subtle, but serious, shortcomings, that we might otherwise never have seen. For example, we come to ask whether the motives for our multiplied daily activities are selfish or selfless. We examine more closely how we feel about our financial status in life as it relates to the source of our security. We may discover ourselves more materialistic than we thought. We probe the real reasons we are anxious, and uncover new dimensions of the faith/anxiety dichotomy. We discover those areas in which we have been self deceived. We are made aware of the ways our lives have been infected by pride. As we gain these, or other, insights, we can address our concerns to them, and find ways to allow God's healing to work on our lives that we did not previously recognize.

Who knows what can happen in a life given to the practice of repentance? For most there will probably be gradual improvement. But now and again there will be such a serious response to the word of God that radical change may be wrought. Some may even sell all they have to give to the poor. The whole nature of a personality may be changed for the better. Some life may begin a programme of introducing others to Jesus that has dramatic results. There is always the possibility of remarkable transformation. We have all seen such cases, though seldom. That is not to imply that the less spectacular repentance in which the rest of us engage daily is invalid. It is necessary and beneficial. But there are those who take God's imperative so seriously they are brought further along the road than most of mankind. And for this, too, we thank God, for these lives speak so powerfully to us. Indeed, your life may become one of these incredibly transformed ones.

Tony Ash.

When you are dying, you will find little comfort in counting the hypocrites who kept you out of the church.



Conducted by
Alf Marsden

“Do you think that Christians in the Church of Christ have become too complacent? It seems to me that we care little about the salvation of others so long as we are saved.”

Complacency is nothing more nor less than self-satisfaction. I suppose what the questioner is asking is this; “have we reached such a degree of satisfaction in our own salvation that we are no longer motivated to go out and seek others?”

I believe it is true to say that self satisfaction is a feature of our society. It is not true in every case, of course, because there are many who are out-reaching and caring, but it is equally true to say that there are those, and there are many of them, who seemingly couldn't care less about others so long as they themselves have their own needs satisfied, and that abundantly. I sometimes wonder if we see our natural needs as being more important than our spiritual needs; but that is another question.

The Bible tells us about those who became complacent. We remember the man who pulled down his barns and built bigger ones and then said, **“Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry”** (Luke 12:16-20). There was also Felix, the Governor, who trembled at the words of Paul and said, **“Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee”** (Acts 24:25). However, I want to bring before you one who was bold and courageous for God and His people; Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. There are important lessons for us to learn as we study this dedicated servant of the Lord God.

Nehemiah — The Man

The one source of information concerning this patriotic leader of the Jews is in the O.T. book which bears his name. We are told that he acted as cup-bearer to the Persian monarch Artaxerxes. The Bible student will remember, of course, that God's people had been in exile in Babylonia, an exile which was to last some 50 years. In 559 B.C. Cyrus the second ascended the throne of nearby Persia, and also became king of Media. God had promised restoration through Isaiah (see Isa. 45:1-5). In 539 B.C. Belshazzar king of Babylon sees the writing on the wall. Babylon falls to the Persian armies, and Cyrus issues two decrees; one authorises the Jewish exiles to return home, the other gives instructions concerning the Temple. (see Psalm 126 and Ezra 6:3-5). The restoration seems to have taken place in three phases, (i) Zerubbabel left (538 B.C.) to restore the Temple, (ii) Ezra left (458 B.C.) to restore the Law, and (iii) Nehemiah left (445 B.C.) to restore the city wall.

We must now turn our attention to the Book of Nehemiah in order to learn from this great leader how to deal with complacency.

Step 1

It seems that Nehemiah heard of the affliction and reproaches of the people in Jerusalem from one Hanani; he also heard that the wall of the city was broken down, and that the gates were burned with fire; more than enough to sadden the heart of one who loved the city so much. So what did this great man do? He mourned, he fasted, and he poured out fervent prayer to the God of Heaven.

We must now pause and learn. How often do we mourn for those who have not turned to Christ; I mean, **really mourn**? I mourned the passing of my mother and father, but the grief I felt at their departing eased with the passage of time. What I

still mourn, and what will **not** be eased, is the fact that they did not come to Christ before they died. We say, rather complacently I feel, "sow the seed, don't worry too much about it, and the harvest will come eventually"; unfortunately, 'the grim reaper of lives' intervenes before the harvest comes. Oh, tragedy. Perhaps the cross that I, and others, may have to bear is the knowledge that perhaps we did not do enough to convince them about the love of God and Christ for them. And yet, as we meet people day by day, we are looking at 'the walking dead', and if we are so complacent that we never try to lead them to life, we know that we have become pall-bearers at **their** funerals. Nehemiah knew that he had to do **something**, but he was also realist enough to know that he could not do it in his own strength. He knew that his grief had to be alleviated by action, and so he prayed to the God of Heaven. He was, however, an objective man, and the substance of his prayer was that God would help him to negotiate the first hurdle, which was permission to leave the king. We too should call upon God perhaps more often to assist us in His work, and we should be equally objective in trying to accomplish it. There is no room for complacency here.

Step 2

Nehemiah then did what every true leader should do; he analysed the task that had to be done. Furthermore, he didn't rely on other people's opinions as to how the task should be accomplished; he went out **himself**, along with a few others, and assessed the work which had to be done.

When any leader embarks on a project which involves other people he has three things in mind; the task, the individual, and the group. It is not only important that the work is done, but **how** it is done is equally important relative to the people who are doing it. Priorities may have to change as the work goes on from the task, to the individual, to the group, as the occasion demands. So how did Nehemiah handle this?

First of all he motivated the workers. He spoke to them of the distress at seeing the walls broken down and the Holy City laid waste. We must not forget that these people were intensely nationalistic, we only need read the 137th Psalm to realise this. To increase their resolve he also pointed out that there would be those who would try to prevent them from doing this great work. He concluded this sequence of motivation by telling them that the mighty hand of God was upon them for good in the work to which they would dedicate themselves. The people, led by the High Priest and the priests, then began the work of restoring the gates. The people had a mind to work, says the scripture.

Don't we find it strange, although we shouldn't, that when the objective is clearly brought into view, and the motivational process is correctly applied, that people respond beyond our wildest expectations? Our Christian lives can become so dull, repetitious, and moribund, that we need to be shaken out of our complacency. Good motivation will help us here.

Step 3

Nehemiah now started the final phase of restoration; the building of the wall. Word had been brought to him that their detractors, Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabians, and the Ammonites, had conspired to fight against Jerusalem and stop the work. Nehemiah now had to change his emphasis from motivation to planning in order to successfully complete the task.

He again reminded them that God was on their side, "**Be not ye afraid of them: remember the Lord, which is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses.**" (4:14). He then devised a plan. The people were to take their implements of work in one hand, and a weapon with which to fight in the other. They were spread out along the wall, so he instructed them that when they heard the sound of the trumpet they were to resort to that point in order to repel the enemy. Again he said, quite simply, "**Our God shall fight for**

us". When they had to sleep they were to remain in the confines of the city while others worked on the wall; they never removed their clothes except to wash.

Such dedication to the cause would remove all complacency. There is a lesson here for us, of course. The enemy, Satan, has torn huge gaps in the walls of the Church. We have to be sufficiently dedicated in order to rebuild, and more than that, we have to keep the weapons handy with which to fight. We cannot use carnal weapons, but we can use the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. What greater inspiration could we find than that? What an antidote against complacency that would be! Would not our hearts burn within us as we contemplated the mighty works of our God and realised that He was still with us? Or has that 'fire' become a dust-laden tome to us, not to be opened because it might upset our ordered, complacent, way of living? God forbid.

There was great rejoicing at the dedication of the completed work. The reading of the Law took place among the people, and they were reminded of all the goodness of God, and His great blessings to them. Is it so surprising that our Lord and Saviour instructs us to meet every first day of the week so that we can be constantly reminded of our great Salvation? Surely not; it is a great and important blessing.

Well, there we have it. Perhaps our questioner is right and we have become too complacent. But constantly calling on the name of the Lord, objectively reviewing the task before us, being motivated to do the work which God wants doing, and for ever guarding our Christian heritage with the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, should dispel our complacency and replace it with the desire to work for Him who loved us and gave Himself for us.

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“IF ANY MAN SPEAK” (1 Peter 4:11)

The Real Communion

Symptomatic

Another matter that some discount as unimportant, claiming it is not necessary to salvation and therefore a matter of opinion, is the use of one drinking vessel at the Lord's table.

Jesus says **“He that is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and he that is unrighteous in a very little is unrighteous in much”**. (Luke 16.10) so anything that Jesus requires of us is important, no matter how insignificant it might seem.

Why raise this issue again when it has caused distress in the past?

For fear of re-opening old wounds we have long hesitated in giving teaching on this subject. Our reticence has left the field wide open for Satan to do his evil work. Congregations have gone astray and have been split by those who have no hesitancy in advocating individual cups. A generation has arisen amongst whom there are many who think that the use of one cup is an innovation. The guilt of their ignorance is on us because of our silence.

The sad thing is that the turning away from New Testament principles, such as these, is symptomatic of serious, spiritual, soul-destroying sickness. Brothers and sisters, this subject is important and we should be able to discuss it without bitterness and rancour.

This do

Some of you might remember my article headed “This Do” and the subsequent correspondence in the Scripture Standard, during 1960 or thereabouts. This article gave rise to much discussion. Not that the issue is complex but the subtlety of the

arguments used to justify departing from the use of one cup, makes it appear complex. As with most false practices, more time is needed to unravel the arguments brought forward to justify the digression, than is required to prove just what should be done.

Jesus said, with regard to both the loaf and the cup "this do" 1 Cor. 11.24,25. How do we decide what he meant by this? "This" is a demonstrative pronoun, and tells us that Jesus was **showing them** what he wanted them to do. So if we examine what he required of them and what they did in response, we will know what "this" is.

Jesus gave thanks for the loaf, broke it, gave it to the disciples and required them to eat it. (Matt. 26.26). "**And as they were eating, (the Passover) Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat;**" Jesus then took a cup of grape juice, gave thanks, gave it to his disciples and required them to drink from it. (Matt. 26.27). "**And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of (gk: ek, out of) it.**" The disciples accepted the cup and they all drank out of it. (Mark 14:23). "**And he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them and they all drank of (gk. ek, out of) it.**" So we have on record what Jesus wanted them to do and what they did in response: in His presence.

The Case is Proved

Whatever else might be said, it cannot alter these patently obvious facts:—

- i) Jesus required them to eat of one loaf and drink of one container.
- ii) That is exactly what they did.

So now we know what he meant by "this" when he said "**This do in remembrance of me**".

Confusion

The issue is clouded by irrelevant talk of antecedents etc. and of crass suggestions: e.g. the apostles were in an upper room, so perhaps we should meet in an upper room.

Demonstrative pronouns and demonstrative adjectives do not have antecedents. Relative pronouns have antecedents. "This" is not a relative pronoun, so the question does not arise. That they happened to be in an upper room was not pertinent to the moment, or the event.

What is pertinent is:—

- i) Jesus required all of them to drink out of the cup which he handed to them.
- ii) That is exactly what they did, which shows precisely what they understood it to mean.

It is as simple as that.

Legalism Deadens

Some Muslims believe that cleaning their teeth a particular way has spiritual merit because Mohammed cleaned his that way. Doing certain actions in a particular way only because Jesus and the apostles did them that way, would be meaninglessly pedantic.

Just as the sabbath was made for man and not man for the sabbath, in the same way we have not been made so that God could have someone around to observe the Lord's supper. God knowing our nature, designed the breaking of the bread for our benefit. Is there then an underlying principle to the requirement to use one cup?

Communion, True Communion

Although I have re-examined the issue many times, except for one small printer's error there is nothing in my old article "This Do" I would alter, either with regard to the loaf or the cup, except to add a few remarks about the use of the word "communion" in 1 Cor. 10.16.

"The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" In the article I outlined, what I considered to be the principles to be observed, in "the breaking of the bread". It is curious that it was the use of one cup that was singled out for debate. No exception was taken to the proposition that one loaf should be

used. This confirms that in the majority, if not all, of the instances where brethren resort to using individual cups, hygiene is the ruling factor, not scriptural principle.

In 1 Cor. 10.17 (“**For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread.**”) the Greek word *artos* cannot mean bread in the generic sense. It must mean loaf. Compare with other translations, e.g. Rotherham, Schonfield and the NIV. The oneness of the body is typified in the one loaf. Our oneness is illustrated in all the congregation partaking of one loaf.

Since verse 17 is explaining what is meant in verse 16b (“**The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?**”). The word communion (gk. *koinonia*) must here mean joint participation, sharing together in, it follows that being part of the same thought-process, it must have the same connotation in the first part of that verse (v.16a “**The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ?**”).

When we break bread then, we are not partaking of the body and blood of the Christ as isolated individuals. Though several are present we have fellowship with each other as one unit **in eating of the one loaf and drinking from the one cup**. In this it is seen that you and I are one unit, the body which he purchased with his own blood (Acts 20.28). Because of Jesus, you matter to me and I matter to you. No brother or sister is looked upon as though he or she is inferior to ourselves. We are of paramount importance to each other.

This supremely important spiritual principle is not seen in the use of individual cups. Modifying any part of the Lord's supper can only detract from its value and be to our spiritual disadvantage.

Brothers and sisters, if it was only a matter of getting a legal injunction right, I would not have resurrected this subject, especially knowing to what extent many, including myself, have been distressed by the unseemly wranglings that have gone on in the past over it.

My desire is that, in appreciating more, the value of doing “this” we might be spiritually enriched, and that such blessings shall not be lost **to future generations**.

Let us not hesitate to encourage each other, with firmness and love, to be faithful to the Word in all things.

Allan Ashurst,
60 Kenwood Road,
Stretford,
Manchester.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Nov. 3	Ezra 9	1 Cor. 7:1-24
Nov. 10	Psa. 39	1 Cor. 7:25-40
Nov. 17	Psa. 115	1 Cor. 8
Nov. 24	Deut 24:10 to 25:4	1 Cor. 9
Nov. 31	Ex. 14:13-31	1 Cor. 10:1-13

Marriage

Paul in this portion of Scripture had some interesting things to say about the institution of marriage. He used the phrases “**the present distress**” (7:26) and “**the time is short**” (7:29), and I believe

they are very significant in an analysis of chapter 7. His words were principally words of guidance to a people then facing serious difficulties by way of persecution.

Adam Clarke commented: **In such times, when the people of God had no certain dwelling-place, when they were lying at the mercy of their enemies without any protection from the state — the state itself often among the persecutors — he who had a family to care for, would find himself in very embarrassed circumstances, as it would be much more easy to provide for his personal safety**

than to have the care of a wife and children. On this account it was much better for unmarried persons to continue for the present in their celibacy." Albert Barnes wrote: "At all events, it is evident that the Christians at Corinth were subject to some trials which rendered the cares of the married life undesirable." F.F. Bruce has said: "Not only did married people incur secular cares and anxieties from which the unmarried were free: in times of persecution and distress, which Paul saw to be impending, an unmarried man was under less powerful temptation to compromise the faith than a man with family responsibilities, whose wife and children might suffer for his confession as well as himself. Paul is prescribing iron rations for hard times, which presaged the end of the present world-order."

"But if any man think that he behaves himself uncomely toward his virgin, if she pass the flower of her age, and need so require, let him do what he wills, he sins not: let them marry. Nevertheless he that stands steadfast in his heart, having no necessity, but has power over his own will, and has so decreed in his heart that he will keep his virgin, does well. So then he that gives her in marriage does well: but he that gives her not in marriage does better" (7:36-28, A.V.). Many commentators are of the view that this passage refers to fathers and unmarried daughters. But please note that the personal pronoun "her" is not in the original. An important question is: Why is it that everytime the term virgin occurs in the Scriptures most readers assume that it refers to a female? The word virgin in ancient times was as common for a man as a woman. Personally, I believe that the ten virgins of Jesus' famous parable of the kingdom (Matthew 25: 1-13) referred to men and not women. After all, they were friends of the bridegroom. But I digress. There is an alternative translation to 1 Corinthians 7:36-38, which I think makes more sense. Here it is: "But if anyone thinks he is behaving improperly towards his virginity, if that is past

the bloom of youth, and this is the way it should take place, let him do what he wants; he does not sin, let them marry. But if anyone stands settled in his heart, having no necessity, but has authority over his own will and has made this decision in his own heart, to keep his own virginity, he will do well. Consequently, he also that gives his virginity in marriage does well, but he that does not give it in marriage will do better."

Meat Offered To Idols

Paul addressed himself to this problem, which is extremely remote to us, but was intensely real to the first-century Christians. We must remember that these early saints lived in a world of pagan idolatry with temples dedicated to false gods. Corinth was no exception. Animal sacrifice was part of the pagan ritual. Many animals were dedicated to a god and then slaughtered – the meat later used for private banquets or sold to the shops and the markets. Could a Christian eat such meat connected with a heathen god? That was the burning question and the one to which Paul carefully responded.

In chapter 8 he lays down an important principle. Those strong in the faith must exercise circumspection and prudence so as not to offend or bewilder a weaker brother. In chapter 9 he marries Christian freedom with Christian responsibility. Freedom does not mean doing what one likes without regard to the general well-being of the church. In chapter 10:1-13, as one writer has put it: "He deals with those who declare that their Christian knowledge and privileged position make them quite safe from any infection. He cites the example of the Israelites who had all the privileges of God's chosen people and who yet fell into sin."

Love, I believe, is the key to the whole problem. Following Christ is never a matter of doing your own thing and getting your own way, but doing unto others as you wish they would do to you and giving yourself to His way.

Paul — The Apostle

Paul in chapter 9 asserted his apostolical character and right to support. A mark of his apostleship was that he had seen the Lord (9:1). Paul to me was a very humble man, who never threw his weight around, even although he was a powerful figure. He is a tremendous example to all followers of Christ, for we see in him self-denial, dedication and zealotry. The preaching of the Gospel meant everything to him. **“For though I preach the Gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea woe is unto me, if I preach not the Gospel”** (9:16)!

Malcolm Muggeridge once said of the apostle Paul that he was one of the greatest men who ever lived. I concur with that view. Anyone who studies the great man's life in detail is bound to be changed — and for the better! I know of men who turned to the Lord from scepticism because of the initial impact of Paul's life upon them. Thanks be to God for that wonderful servant!

Illustrations from Grecian Contests

Kenneth S. Wuest in his book *Bypaths* deals with the Greek games in the light of 1 Corinthians 9:24-27. He points out that the isthmus of Corinth was the scene of the Isthmian games, one of the four great national festivals of the Greeks. **“Striving for the mastery”** (9:25), he says, **“is from a Greek word which refers to an athlete contending or striving in the games ... ‘Temperate’ is from a word which refers to the ten months preparatory training ... If an athlete goes through ten months of rigorous training which involves rigid self-denial and much hardship in order that he might compete in a contest that may last a few minutes or a few hours at the most, and for a prize, a chaplet of oak leaves: should not a Christian be willing to subject himself to just as rigid a discipline and self-denial in order that he might serve the Lord Jesus in an acceptable manner?”**

We know not if the ancient athletes resorted to illegal drugs to enhance their

performances. Certainly, such activity has discredited modern athletics. My brethren, let our striving be honest and true — an example to a corrupted world.

Lessons from the Old Testament Scriptures

Someone once said: “The Old Testament is the New concealed and the New Testament is the Old revealed.” Make no mistake about it, a knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures is vital to our understanding of the New Testament Scriptures. I think this is where a lot of brethren fall down — and I include myself here. So to rectify matters, it is my intention over the next nine months to read very little else other than the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament, with special attention to their archaeology and geography. I hope my studies will culminate in a visit to Israel with professional archaeologists to study some of the ancient Biblical sites, of which I have read a great deal.

“Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come” (10:11). We should learn from the mistakes of ancient Israel. We should not be tempted as they were tempted. We should not murmur against God, as they murmured against Him. We should not succumb to idolatry as they fell into idolatrous worship. Today, we have no excuse because we have their lessons and have been warned. Not to heed the warnings is to sin against God and be in danger of even greater punishment.

Ian S. Davidson,
Motherwell.

WOMEN'S ROLE ON CHURCH BUSINESS AND TEACHING

I have learned much from articles by Roy Davison in the past and look forward to reading more, God willing, in the future.

However, I do believe that there is a difference between teaching a man and

teaching over a man. A speaker in an assembly teaches over that assembly. One teaching in private is imparting knowledge in a situation where questions and replies are in order. I, personally, have learned much from our sisters, particularly my daughter, Ann.

It would seem to me that as the whole church, which must have included women, agreed to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch (Acts 15:22) then a precedent has been established for our sisters to be involved in decision making.

Regarding teaching articles written by women, I would like to quote the following extract from Guy N. Wood's book *Questions and Answers, Volume 2*:—

"First Timothy 2:11,12 forbids a woman to teach "over a man". That there is a difference in teaching a man and teaching over a man is very clear from the fact that Priscilla, wife of Aquila, did indeed, and with the obvious approval of the Holy Spirit, participate in the teaching of Apollos. (Acts 18:24-28.) Moreover, it would have been equally acceptable for Aquila and Priscilla to have written the instructions to the young evangelist which they gave orally. In teaching over a man there is the exercise of authority which 1 Timothy 2:11, 12 forbids: this is certainly involved in preaching (see Titus 2:15), and to some extent also in the teaching of Bible classes, since the teacher both directs and controls in some measure those participating. In reading material sent out,, the reader exercises his own will and pleasure in the perusal and is in no sense subject to, nor under the domination of, the author."

Bill Cook,
22 The Beeches,
Woodside, Glenrothes,
Fife KY7 5EA.

(I invited comments from readers on this subject. Bill Cook's is the only response so far. Anyone else out there who can give advice and information to sister Payne on this subject?)

HELP FOR GHANA

Long term — Low Cost Appeal

This month I am appealing to my brethren who wish to send small amounts of money, on a regular basis, for MEDICAL PURPOSES among our brethren in Ghana.

I propose to set up three separate Funds, in Accra, Koforidua and Patriensa. It is my intention to accumulate the donations for 12 weeks and then split this sum three ways, sending equal amounts to the leaders in each of these congregations to use for the MEDICAL needs of their area.

Accra will be one area on its own, Koforidua will also cover the members in Huhunya, and Patriensa will cover Odumasi and Dunkwa. Depending on the response, a fourth and final account will be opened in Angu which would cover the smaller congregations to Takoradi and Asuansi.

Again I stress that 100% of all money collected, will go to Ghana. If anyone prefers to give a single donation annually, please make this clear at the time of donating, as this will greatly assist me in planning. Receipts will be issued annually and a report of how this money has been used will be given in the Scripture Standard.

If you wish to help in this project, please send your donation to me at the address below:—

Graeme Pearson,
13 Fairways,
Dunfermline
Fife KY12 0DU.
Tel. (0383) 728624.

(P.S. Many thanks to Sister Grace for the donation towards the work in Ghana, received on 7th October, 1989.)

BOOK WANTED

A Canadian brother, who enjoys the 'Scripture Standard' is looking for a copy the '*Parallel Gospels*'. Anyone with a spare copy, or know where one can be found? Contact Ed.

COMING EVENTS

Special Saturday Evening Meetings

At the meeting house of the Church in Motherwell (Dalziel Street):—

Speaker: Bro. Ian S. Davidson.

Subject: "Women's Place In Society and the Church."

Dates: 4th: 11th & 18th Nov. 1989.

Time: 6.30 p.m.

All Welcome.

BIRTH

To Steven and Margaret Massood a boy (Christopher) on Thursday 12th October. Mother and Baby are well. Congratulations to the family. Steven's new address is 48 Eastbourne Street, Abbey Hills, OLDHAM, Lancs. OL8 2BZ.

WHAT WAS IT ?

A lady approached a business man and asked for a donation towards a church building.

"Yes I'll give \$100.00 to the building," replied the business man, "If you'll erect a sign over the door saying 'This is a church of Christ'."

"Oh, no, we couldn't do that," answered the lady, "because this is not a church of Christ."

"Very well," said the business man, "I'll still give the \$100.00 if you'll put up a sign saying 'This is not a church of Christ'."

"Oh, no sir, you know we couldn't do that, because it is a church of Christ."

I wonder what kind of a church it was?

Selected

TAKE TIME

Take Time TO THINK . . . it is the source of power.

Take Time TO PLAY . . . it is the secret of perpetual youth.

Take Time TO READ . . . it is the fountain of wisdom.

Take Time TO PRAY . . . it is the greatest power on earth.

Take Time TO LOVE and BE LOVED . . .

It is a God given privilege.

Take Time TO BE FRIENDLY . . . it is the road to happiness.

Take Time TO LAUGH . . . it is the music of the soul.

Take Time TO GIVE . . . it is too short a day to be selfish.

Take Time TO WORK . . . it is the price of success.

Take Time TO ENJOY GOOD FOOD . . . it is the source of health.

Take Time TO STUDY . . . it will help you all the days of your life.

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