

# The SCRIPTURE STANDARD

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

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## TRYING TO PLEASE

Events in the House of Commons this week have again demonstrated, if we did not already know it, that most politicians are like chameleons and change political colour to suit their surroundings, at any given time. Because the Maastricht issue seemed a good opportunity to bring the present government down, or at least gravely injure it, we had the bizarre spectacle of many M.P.'s in the Commons voting completely contrary to their previously stated 'principles'. Those in favour of Maastricht voted against it: and many who hate it voted for it: all in the name of political expediency. The 'principles' of most M.P.'s appear to be extremely elastic and most accommodating. Politicians realise, of course, that they must weigh each word and vote most carefully, for what will **please** some of their constituents will just as surely **displease** others. Perhaps it is unfair to single out politicians for such notice, for, after all, **we are all** inclined to be circumspect in what we say and do, and to further our own self-interest. Before moving on to discuss what we are all prepared to say, and do, to be well-pleasing to our friends and neighbours, it is difficult to resist a comment on the other great and controversial vote of this week; i.e. the vote of the General Synod of the Church of England on the acceptance, or otherwise, of women into their priesthood. Dr. Josef Goebbels, the cunning propagandist employed by Hitler during the second world war, used to say that if the lie is big enough, and told often enough, eventually the gullible public will accept it. At one time women priests in the Church of England would have been unthinkable but over the years the matter has been widely publicised and every time a vote is taken on it the gap narrows. The C. of E. do not have the 'whips' the House of Commons can bring to bear, but apparently have their own methods of narrowing the vote (any priest not in favour of women priests would be unlikely ever to be a Bishop); and there is much 'lobbying' in the vestries, with 'strong personalities' winning others over to their side. It is thought that the C. of E. is now 'ready' for women priests.

It is well known that this issue will split the C. of E. asunder (vast though it is) and indeed has already done so, but this grave consequence has not deterred those who are highly intent on having women priests: and their view is that if splitting the church is the price to be paid for 'progress', then it must be paid. These dreadful sentiments seem to have a familiar ring to them. I have never been able to understand how something scripturally untenable or, (in the case of the C. of E.) 'theologically' untenable can, after the passage of a few years with a bit of 'lobbying' here and there, become scripturally acceptable. Churches of Christ are no exception to this phenomenon, and only a hundred years ago, or so, in the USA, many things (like the instrument,

the clergy system, individual containers, theological seminaries, sisters in worship with heads uncovered, etc.) were generally regarded as completely untenable on a scriptural basis, but a few years later were in popular use. Only fifty years ago in Britain, if anyone had suggested putting individual containers on the Lord's Table, or sisters in worship without some form of head-covering, there would have been gasps of disbelief and outrage, even from some of those who now happily use and advocate these things. Both in the USA and Britain the price (in terms of division) has been paid and the innovators have got their way. Fifty years ago the Church of Christ was not 'ready' for these things: now it apparently is. These remarks, though true, will not go down very well with some: but surely we are quite 'Pharisaical' when we berate the 'denominations' but are not prepared to notice that 'Churches of Christ' can do the same things when they want to; and if led by the appropriate people. Those pushing change in the C. of E. will eventually get their way, if not this time, then the next: and division will be a seemingly easy price to pay. Dr. Goebbels wasn't far wrong in his assessment of the weakness, gullibility, and even the whimsicality of the human species. (In order to avoid unnecessary correspondence please let me say that I am not in favour of male 'priests', let alone female). However, back to the subject.

#### Efforts to Please

Most things we say, or do, in this life please some, but displease others. This is true for all of us, not just politicians. Indeed a great deal of our time is spent trying to please. Shopkeepers and businessmen are in constant competition trying to please customers and at one time 'The customer was always right.' As employees, we try and please our employers, as husbands we try and please our wives and as parents we try and please our children. There are some who are difficult to please and there are some we have given up trying to please and don't care whether we please them or not. How good are we at trying to please the Lord? The Apostle Paul expresses a truism (in 1st Cor. 7:32-33) when he says, "**He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the 'Lord, how he may please the Lord. But he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife.**" Notwithstanding that a lot of wives would care to challenge the latter part of the quotation, the statement is generally true. The bachelor evangelist can go anywhere at a moment's notice to preach the word and is completely unfettered by the responsibilities of parenthood and so has a distinct advantage in the Lord's work over the married disciple. However I only mention the quotation of Paul, at this time, to illustrate that, as far as Paul is concerned, the main object and consideration in life should be "**to care for the things of the Lord**" and how "**we may please the Lord.**"

Sometimes, to please God we must say something which will displease people, even our friends and thus sometimes we remain silent. In Matt. 21:27 we read that the Chief Priests and Elders refused to answer a question from Jesus because they feared the people. The apostles and early disciples had no such reservations and received many floggings and spent many days in jails because what they said displeased their religious fellow-men. The early evangelists were not usually thinking of what their next hotel would be like; more often wondering how bad the next prison would be. Paul's attitude is summed up in Gal. 1:10 when he asks, "**For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men, for if I pleased men I should not be the servant of Christ. But I certify you brethren that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For neither received I it of man, neither was I taught it but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.**" Paul could have pleased a lot of men by altering, adapting and tailoring the message, but this was certainly far from his intention. On the other hand, Paul did not consciously set out to be offensive to his fellow-man but tried, as far as possible, to live peaceably with all men.

### Pleasing for Profit

There are some who make studied efforts to please, entirely for their own profit and self-interest. Again this is not confined to politicians or shop-keepers, but affects all of us and is often referred to as 'being diplomatic'.

There were, of course, even in N.T. times those who sought to please men for their own profit. Herod, for instance vexed the Church because he discovered that this pleased the Jews. In Acts 12:1 we read, "Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the Church, and killed James the brother of John with the sword. And, because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also." Similarly, we read that Paul was left bound because Felix saw that it would please the Jews (Acts 24:27). In turn, in Acts 25:9 we are informed, "But Festus willing to do the Jews a pleasure answered Paul and said, Wilt thou go to Jerusalem and there be judged of these things before me." It is also significant to read in John 12 that, "Among the Chief Rulers also many believed on him: but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him lest they be put out of the synagogue. For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God." Oftentimes since, there must have been multitudes who likewise have smothered their belief in Christ in case they displeased their friends and were put out of, not the synagogue, but the club or clique, or gang, or circle.

Paul knew of the profit motive in pleasing others, and exhorted the Corinthians, "Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the Church of God: Even as I please all men in all things, NOT SEEKING MINE OWN PROFIT, but the profit of many, that they may be saved." (1 Cor. 10:32). It may seem a contradiction that Paul says here that he tried to 'please all men' whereas in Gal. 1:10 (previously quoted) he says that if he tried to please men he would not be the servant of Christ, but, of course, we understand him to mean that although he would not alter his doctrine or preaching to please men, he would try to please men in every other legitimate way, giving no unnecessary offence, always with an eye to "the profit of many: that they might be saved."

Last Sunday, from the congregational Scripture Reading Card, we read from Rom. 15, the first three verses of which say, "We then that are strong, ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, AND NOT TO PLEASE OURSELVES. Let every one PLEASE HIS NEIGHBOUR for his good to edification. FOR EVEN CHRIST PLEASSED NOT HIMSELF but, as it is written. The reproaches of them that reproached Thee fell on Me." This is heady stuff indeed: that we should all subjugate our own self-interest and seek to promote the profit of our neighbours. The aim, however, is their good, their edification and their ultimate salvation. And what a transformation it would make to a wicked world if this directive was widely implemented. Christ is again the Great Exemplar. We might claim that we can "please ourselves" in what we do, but Jesus "pleased not Himself" and we are to follow that example: albeit a hard act to follow.

### Pleasing God

So far we have been speaking of things likely to please neighbours, relatives, friends, and even ourselves, but what about things pleasing to God?

The writer to the Hebrews tells us that no one can ever be pleasing to God unless they begin on the proper footing. He says, "But without FAITH it is impossible to please God: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." (Heb. 11:16). And so, for MEN IN GENERAL to be well-pleasing to God, they must have faith in God (and all that entails) and they must believe that God IS, and that God will reward such as DILIGENTLY SEEK Him. Paul says that it is impossible to please God unless all these ingredients are present. That is his message to the world at large.

If we are CHILDREN Paul says to us, “Children, obey your parents in all things for this is well-pleasing unto the Lord”. We don’t have to be sociologists, or criminologists, to know that much of the unrest and heart-break in society today is due to the breakdown of family relationships and lack of parental control over children. The fault does not always lie with the children, of course, and elsewhere Paul warns parents not to vex their children.

If we are EMPLOYEES Paul instructs us thus, “Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters, according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as unto Christ. Not with eye-service, as men-pleasers, but as servants of Christ do the will of God from the heart”. (Eph. 6:5).

To THE DISCIPLES IN GENERAL the writer to the Hebrews said, “But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well-pleased”. With what is God well-pleased? With those amongst Christ’s followers, who DO GOOD and who are GENEROUS with their money and possessions. We can have every confidence that all the good and kind actions, of compassion and benevolence, do not go unnoticed by God. A few verses further on in this wonderful closing chapter of Hebrews, the writer expresses the hope that “The God of peace that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that Great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you THAT WHICH IS WELL PLEASING in His sight, through Jesus Christ: to whom be glory for ever and ever” (Heb. 13:16,20). “Every good work” in “the doing of His will” would take a long time to describe or catalogue, were that possible, but here again we have God’s assurance that every act of worship or praise, and every kind charitable action is of such consequence to God that it pleases Him greatly. God sees the virtues as well as the vices. When Paul, in his need, received succour from the Christians in Philippi, he described it as “an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God”. (Phil. 4:18).

### Conclusion

In briefly summing up, we note Paul’s view of the difference between the married man, and the unmarried; the former caring “for the things that belong to the Lord” and “how he may please the Lord”: whereas the latter gets involved in the pressures of life, “the things of the world” and “how he may please his wife”. Paul refused to please men in matters doctrinal, or in the adulteration of his gospel, but went to great lengths to please men in every other way, not in any way to profit Paul, but to profit others, in that they might be saved. Paul also taught that, in the Church, men should not seek to pursue their own self-interests (as some do even to the dividing of the Church) but should ever endeavour to please and accommodate his neighbour for his good and edification. William Barclay says of this passage (Rom. 15:1) “The fellowship of Christians should be marked by consideration of its members for each other. But it must be noted that this consideration must not degenerate into an easy-going, sentimental pliable laxity. It must always be designed for the other person’s good, and for his upbuilding in the faith”.

Last, but most certainly not least, we must also seek to please God, through faith and every good work, to do His will. We are informed that “By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found because God has translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, THAT HE PLEASSED GOD”. (Heb. 11:5). This marvellous testimony is one to which we can all aspire and can in due time, share with Enoch the heavenly accolade: “we pleased God”.

EDITOR.

## GLEANINGS

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

### CALLED OUT

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

### I COULD NOT DO WITHOUT THEE

"I could not do without Thee!

I cannot stand alone,  
I have no strength or goodness,  
No wisdom of my own.  
But Thou, beloved Saviour,  
Art all in all to me;  
And weakness will be power,  
If leaning hard on Thee."

**WE QUOTE G. H. HOLMES**

### Spiritual Growth

"That there are conditions and laws to be obeyed in order to the advancement of the soul is obvious. Just as the growth of the natural babe is subject to the laws of nature, so there are parallel laws in the Spiritual world which must be obeyed in order to the growth of the Christian. The principle, which is the root of all Spiritual growth, the foundation of the building of Christian character, is faith in God; a firm unwavering faith in His precepts and promises. To speak of growth, or to offer suggestions without taking cognizance of this root principle, is to speak of growth without root, of a building without foundation. Faith is the principle of the Kingdom by which we appropriate Spiritual blessings. God's institutions, or ordinances, are means of grace to us; but they are nothing and meaningless, and cannot be enjoyed without faith.

### Christian Growth

The apostle Peter, who exhorts us to grow in grace, also shows us that faith is the source from which all virtues and graces must be supplied (2 Peter 1:5 to 8). In your faith supply virtue; and in your virtue knowledge; and in your knowledge temperance; and in your temperance patience; and in your patience Godliness; and in your Godliness love of the brethren; and in your love of the brethren, love; where these things abound we have fruitful Christians, and Christian growth is in exact proportion, as these things are exemplified in the life.

### Christian Character

Again, a growing faith uplifts the soul, takes to the mountain tops, and widens our spiritual outlook; it helps us to a fuller apprehension of things divine, and blends the life with God. Having faith as the foundation of the building of Christian character, the root of Spiritual growth, what are the means of grace that will sustain and strengthen this life, in order to the promotion of growth!

### Spiritual Food

First, the soul needs constant nourishment; it must be fed with wholesome food. This condition is just as essential to the growth and progress of the soul as food is to the development of the body, and the unfolding of natural powers. The statement made by Jesus when tempted to convert stones into bread is significant. **"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God"**. The life, here referred to, is the life of the soul which, to be sustained, must be fed upon Spiritual food, viz., **"The Word of God"**. Peter exhorts the brethren thus: (1 Peter 2:2): **"As newborn babes long for the Spiritual milk, which is without guile, that ye may grow thereby unto salvation"**. The word of God, then, affords food for the

soul, upon which it can thrive and grow and become vigorous.

### Spiritual Invalids

But this is not unconditional; the Scriptures must be read before the strength to be derived therefrom can be appropriated. A closed and unread Bible means a dwarfed soul. Here, one fears, is the secret of so many Spiritual invalids, so much half-heartedness, so many weak Christians. It is a moral impossibility to grow spiritually strong without attendance to means that conduce to growth and strength; just as well might we think of a child becoming healthy and strong without suitable food. But all food taken into the system must be assimilated in order to give strength and energy. Whatever food is taken and not digested is positively injurious.

### Spiritual Vitality

Just so in relation to the Word, our Spiritual food; it is not necessarily the quantity we read or pass over with a cursory glance, not reading of consecutive chapters, or books of the Bible, that yields strength to the soul, but it is that which is **mentally digested** which is conducive to growth and Spiritual vitality. God's Holy Word, then, to supply the much needed strength of the soul, must be approached and read prayerfully, reverently, and thoughtfully. We ought, like David, to meditate upon the word day and night, or use a well-known phrase, to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest the great truths of the Bible.

### Spiritual Strength

It is by thus pondering over the word, and going below the surface that its jewels of truth are disclosed to the mind, Spiritual strength received, and growth in the divine life sustained. Of such a one David says: **"He shall be like a tree planted by rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season: his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper"**. The Bible should be so read that its living truths and principles, with its exceeding great and precious promises, should be incorporated into our moral nature, and so impress our whole life. All books that are read meditatively cannot fail to have some influence upon us, and are, therefore, a great and potent force in moulding and shaping character.

### Spiritual Realm

This being so, how necessary that our literature should be pure, having a high tone of morality, and suggestive of good and noble thoughts, and so calculated to expand, enlarge, and exalt the mind. The light impure literature, which is so widely circulated around us, reveals baneful effects upon the moral and religious life; and so should be avoided by all Christians. It is indeed poisonous to the soul; the mind that feeds upon such food cannot fail to be influenced for evil in some degree. To feed the body with unwholesome food would be to invite sickness and premature decay; and this same principle is applicable to the Spiritual realm. To grow spiritually, the mind must be exercised upon that which is Spiritual and eschew all that which is in any way immoral.

### Our Growth in Grace

The character is fashioned according to the thought, for thought is the foundation of character, so that life is but the expression of the thought. Jesus said: **"Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh"**.

To encourage and foster thoughts that are immoral and unholy will warp the mind and render it impure; consequently the fountain of thought being polluted the life and character will be proportionately corrupt and unholy. It is important, therefore, to guard the mind against evil by keeping it exercised in that which is good; to feed upon the living bread, and to drink deeply from the spring of living water. These means will certainly conduce to our growth in grace, and will surely impair the taste for worldliness. Yea, to such a soul the things of the world will become repellant.

“Bible Advocate” 1903.  
Selected by Leonard Morgan.

## HIDING FROM GOD

Can a man hide himself in secret? That was the great question the prophet Jeremiah placed before the Israelite nation. They had, time and again, amid great blessings from God, displeased and disobeyed God, thinking they could hide from Him, but God declared **“Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him”** (Jeremiah 23:24).

Let us look at a few examples in the Old and New Testaments and then apply the lesson. Adam tried without success to hide himself from God. After he realised he had sinned, God called to him (in Genesis 3:9). **“Adam, where art thou?”** Adam replied **“I was afraid because I was naked, and hid myself”**, then Adam, like so many men today, including professed Christians, tried to camouflage his sin by blaming Eve. Eve, in turn, attempted without success to blame the serpent. It was entirely their own individual responsibility and guilt for going against God’s will. Oh! that we as Christians could imitate the humble spirit of David, who (in Psalm 139:23) admitted is unworthiness before God. This followed an acknowledgement of God’s goodness and intimate acquaintance with the creation. David’s daily witness of God’s goodness, and action convinced him to understand. He also admitted that even if he tried to hide himself from God, such would be impossible (V 6). Jonah, likewise, tried to conceal himself from God but we know the sequel.

David spoke also of his birth and claimed that: the mere thought of it was very precious to him (Psalm 139:14-18). Thus when David appealed to God, and admitted his unworthiness, no doubt pride was absent. We see an attitude of sincere humility when he said (V 23) **“Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me; and know my thoughts; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting”**. Who of us, in our day and time, would be so bold and courageous as to ask God to search , and try, and know us? Are we willing to call upon God, to give Him the opportunity to search our hearts and know our thoughts, and to face the matter fearlessly? Bear in mind that the Creator, the God who heard and saw the disobedient acts of ancient Israel and others through the ages, the God who heard the sincerely admitted unworthiness of David, is **the same God** we will answer to. He said through the apostle Paul, **“He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is in the mind of the Spirit (Romans 8:27).**

We must serve with reverence and Godly fear, in an acceptable manner, because **“our God is a consuming fire”** (See Hebrews 12:28). It is no wonder that Jeremiah the Prophet could claim with confidence and surety **“Can any man hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him?”** It is further written, **“Neither is there any creature that is not manifest (known) in His sight . . . with whom all of us . . . shall have to give an account”** (See Romans 14:12, 2nd Cor. 5:10).

Or are we like Peter who tried vainly to hide his identity as being one of the disciples of Jesus by saying **“I know not the man (Matt. 26:69-74).** Are we like his disciples in general, who hid their true identity and forsook Jesus by fleeing from the arrest scene? are we like Judas who hid his tenuous love for the Master by selling Him for thirty pieces of silver. (Matt. 26:46-49).

We can behave as they did by exchanging the things of Christ for the temporary things of the world. Are we like Ananias and Sapphira, of unquestioned prosperity yet who both agreed to lie to God, and the Holy Spirit i.e. to hide something from God. This was a vain attempt resulting in utter tragedy (see Acts 5:1-10).

Maybe as Christians we too could be imitators of these weak persons. We may

think we hide our capabilities, talents, and blessings for God and man. We may be successful in hiding from man, but from God we cannot. Whether our talent is preaching, singing or visiting, or writing, etc. God still expects such a person to make full use of the abilities given to spread the borders of the Kingdom. Souls are perishing and destined to a Christless Eternity if we fail in teaching them of Christ. It is the obligation and responsibility of all who name the name of Christ to be **“steadfast unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord”** (1st Cor. 15:58).

We have all been put in trust with the gospel and are obligated to proclaim it.

May we be like David of old (who had much in his life that he would have wished to conceal) and so live that we might invite God to **“Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me: and lead me in the way everlasting”**. Each day this should be our ardent prayer. Certainly we can never conceal our lives from God.

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## CHRISTIANS AND THE CHURCH

I have often heard sermons about the Church and about its characteristics and I am becoming convinced that even though we speak in harmony with the scriptures concerning these common beliefs among us, we are still missing something. Even our most well-intentioned sermons leave the impression that we are comparing scriptural points with other churches. We have allowed ourselves to fall into a trap which is a product of our society. Everyone has “his own church” and everyone is proud of the strong points about “his church”. But misses the point. God did not design the Church for it to compare itself to denominations. The Church itself is not to be a denomination. But this is the impression people get of us! It does not matter what we say it is. It is what people **think** about which produces their reaction. They see us simply as another religious organisation with several peculiarities coupled with what they perceive, at least in some places, as an arrogant spirit.

What is the remedy for these perceptions? I suggest that the problem of the Church being thought of as just another denomination will not be solved until there is a movement back to more individual spirituality as opposed to organisational identity. Most people, for example, do very little positive work for Christ unless it is assigned by a church committee. We wait upon the organisation to act. But God saved me — not the organisation. God saved my brother — not the organisation. My brother and I are the Church. The Church works when he and I live as Christians.

We must understand that when people view the organisation they are not going to be impressed. Oh, it may be active, or dead, or in-between, but in any case it will not matter to them because they see religious organisations everywhere. Even the moonies are super-organised.

What will impress people? Simply Christians who live as neighbours and co-workers who kindly, gently, and patiently sow the good news. Was this not how early Christianity spread? Maybe our “restoration” restored too much. We have tried to compete with denominations in our buildings, in our staffs, in our organisation, and we cannot do it. We are outnumbered, outfinanced, and “out-experted”. We must promote a restoration of Christianity to be centred on the individual. The urgency of this “neo-restoration” is real because people in our society are not going to be attracted to what they see as just another church. They will be attracted to Christ in us.

P. Black.



## FAITH AND KNOWLEDGE

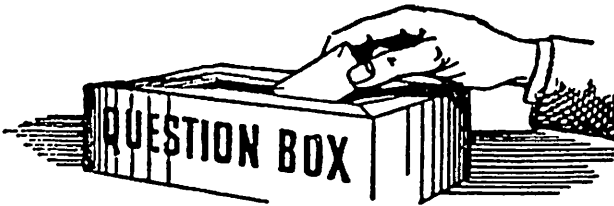
The Hebrew writer tells us very simply what faith is. In Hebrews 11:1 we read, “**Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen**”. The word “substance” here means foundation, so faith is the foundation of all our hopes. The word “evidence” here means the matter supporting the argument or simply testimony. The word faith means more than just a strong belief: it implies knowledge. In verse three of this passage, we read that “**through faith we understand . . .**” so the evidence convicts us, through knowledge. “**of things not seen**”.

The main elements of faith in its relation to the invisible God are distinct from faith in man. They are a **firm conviction**, producing a full acknowledgement (which is to admit as true: to recognise the authority and/or claims of) of God’s revelation or truth. The object of Abraham’s faith was not God’s promise (Gen. 17), that was only the occasion of its performance; his faith rested on **the knowledge of God and that he was able to do that which he said he would do** (Rom. 4:17,20,21) Abraham “staggered not” or didn’t waver in the least in his faith concerning the promise of God, but was firm and absolute in that faith, and because he did not stagger, it was imputed to Abraham for righteousness (v22). In verses 23 and 24, we read that this was not written only for Abraham’s sake but as an encouragement for us today, to the intent that we believe on God who raised up His Son, the great Seed that was promised to Abraham.

As evidenced by Abraham and elsewhere in the Scriptures, we can see that faith is more than just a blind leap in the dark. We can know **that God is and that he will do what he says he will do**.

In Job 19:25, we can see that Job’s faith led him to say, “**I know that my Redeemer liveth**”. Paul said in 2 Timothy 1:22, “**I know whom I have believed**”. We sing songs in praise to God with words very similar to these. Do we have the faith that will let us truly say that we know God is?

J. B. Hill.




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Conducted by  
Alf Marsden

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**“Can you please tell me something about Hell? I do not often hear any preaching or teaching about this subject”?**

It seems to become unfashionable to make mention of Hell in lessons and sermons; perhaps this is because **so much** was made of the subject in the early years of this century: one could almost smell the brimstone when preachers of that era were in full flow. We now seem more concerned with social and philosophical problems, which, of course, is quite good, but nevertheless teaching about Hell should not be neglected because there are dire warnings in the Bible about the necessity for people **not** to be found there eventually. Perhaps it is because Hell is depicted as being so vile that we turn to talking about Heaven instead, and so the warnings are not heeded by people who should understand what Hell is like.

It is interesting to note that many people when questioned seem to have the idea that Hell and Heaven are not **places** as such; they seem to suggest that each person makes up his or her own personal Heaven or Hell while they are living here on earth. I suppose their difficulty lies in the fact neither place can be **located** geographically

on earth or astronomically in space. However, there are pointers in the legends and myths of ancient Greece and Rome, but more importantly, so far as the Christian is concerned, in the Biblical narrative.

### Classical Mythology

Webster's New International Dictionary defines a myth as, "a story that is usually of unknown origin and a least partially traditional, that ostensibly relates historical events usually of such character as to serve to explain some practice, belief, institution, or natural phenomenon, and that is especially associated with religious rites and beliefs". It seems that the Greeks and Romans wanted to perpetuate the memory of their heroes and their exploits by seeking to deify them, and so we have all their **mythological** gods, but seemingly based on **real** ideas of **real** people who had existed, even though the gods themselves were **unreal**. The sources I shall mention just briefly are the writings of Homer, Plato and Vergil, and these only insofar as they comment on the after-life. The writings pre-date Christianity, but it seems quite likely that they would have influenced Greek and Roman culture and thought well into the Christian era.

Homer's *Odyssey* tells the tale of Odysseus wandering about and trying to find his way back to his home in Ithaca after the Trojan Wars. Book XI tells of his visit to the underworld (Hades) to consult one Tiresias the seer, about his journey. They sailed to 'the limits of the world' and in a place that had been indicated to him Odysseus dug a pit with his sword 'a cubit in length and breadth'. He then made an offering to the dead, and killed some sheep whose blood then went into the pit; only then was he able to communicate with the dead, and only then after they (the dead) had drunk of the blood. Then the spirits of the dead came out of Erebus (Hades) one by one and Odysseus spoke with them. Then Achilles spoke with him, "How durst thou come down to the house of Hades, where dwell the senseless dead, the phantoms of men outworn"? Odysseus answered him, "Wherefore let not thy death be any grief to thee, Achilles". To which came the reply, "Nay, speak not comfortably of death, oh great Odysseus. Rather would I live on ground, with landless man who had no great livelihood, than bear sway among all the dead that be departed".

Homer's Hades, then, is a picture of spirits wandering around aimlessly, with no joy and in eternal gloom. All end up in the same place, and there seems to be no distinction between the great and the small.

Plato, in the last book of the *Republic*, talks about the myth of someone called Er. Evidently this man died in battle with others but only **his** body remained uncorrupted and he came back from the dead to tell the tale. While dead, he went to a place where he saw four openings; two went down into earth, and two went up into the sky. Between these openings sat judges; the just they sent to the openings which went into the sky, and the unjust were sent to the openings which went downwards. He also saw souls coming up from the earth covered with dust and dirt, and others coming down from the sky all pure and shining. They exchanged greetings and compared their experiences; the ones from below with weeping and wailing, and the ones from above told of sights of indescribable beauty. The mythical Er then saw lots cast before them and choices as to the next cycle mortal life had to be made. In the main, he said, they made their choices on the basis of their experiences of their previous lives. There were some so incurably wicked that they were hurled down into Tartarus, the deep abyss.

Evidently Plato's philosophy is of the trans-migration of souls, But the emphasis is on **two** places for the dead rather than one, with the addition of Tartarus for the incurably evil.

Vergil's journey to the Underworld, as told in the *Aeneid*, speaks of souls being transported across the dark and turbulent river Styx by Charon the ferryman. On the

far shore they come to the fields of Mourning, and further along to where the road divides; one path going to Tartarus, and the other to Elysian Fields. Sins committed while on earth and for which punishment is due, move men along the road to Tartarus, described as a most awful place, with flaming rocks and raging torrents. One punishment is to attempt to carry water in order to alleviate the heat, but the effort is in vain because the buckets have no bottoms. The ones who travel the other road need to have a period of purification because they are stained with this world's ills; something like Purgatory, I suppose. They then move on pure to the Elysian Fields (Paradise, no doubt).

This, then, is a very brief comment on these myths, but there are excellent books in most Reference Libraries for anyone wanting to read more.

### Biblical Teaching

In most places in the N.T. Hell should be more correctly rendered **Hades**; it corresponds to **Sheol** in the O.T. W. E. Vine defines it as **"the region of departed spirits of the lost (but including the blessed dead in periods preceding the Ascension of Christ)"**. In Matt. 5:22 and 18:8,9 the Greek word **GEENA** is used and represents the Hebrew **GE-Hinnom** (the valley of Hinnom); this word is the one used by the Lord Himself on most occasions. It seems to be the place of eternal punishment. See Mark 9:43-47. It is known as **GEHENNA**.

Another scripture to look at is 2 Pet. 2:4. Samuel Bagster in his Englishman's Greek N.T. renders this verse, **"For if God the angels who sinned spared not, but having cast them to the deepest abyss to chains of darkness delivered them for judgment having been kept"**. This refers to the region of **TARTARUS**, the place of the 'deepest abyss'. This seems to be the place referred to by the devil-possessed man to whom Jesus spoke. See Luke 8:31. Bagster has this verse, **"And he besought him that he would not command them into the abyss to go away"**. This, of course, refers to the devils that Jesus was going to cast out.

One of the most striking scriptures (to me anyway) is found in Luke 16:19-31. Many refer to this as a parable, but I am not persuaded. In any case it would seem to matter very little whether it is parabolic or not, the situation seems to be clear enough. Two men die, one goes to Hades which is obviously a place of punishment and torment; one goes to Abraham's Bosom, which is obviously a place of **PARADISE**. You will do doubt recall that Jesus said to the repentant thief **"this day thou shalt be with me in Paradise"**. Now when Peter spoke to the people on the first Pentecost he spoke about the patriarch David and said, **"He (David) seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ that His soul was not left in Hell (Hades), neither his flesh did see corruption"**. Acts 2:31. If then, Jesus went into Hades when He died, then Paradise must have been a region of Hades at that time. But Jesus was resurrected from among the dead and subsequently ascended into Heaven to be at the right hand of God, because Heaven is where God is. In Vergil's mythology, one had to journey through Hades, as it were, in order to reach the Elysian Fields which, I suppose, equates with our Paradise. So we either accept that there is an intermediate region in Hades into which those who die in Christ go, or we look upon Abraham's Bosom as Heaven to which place those who die in Christ go. The only other explanation is that Paradise is a separate place altogether where the dead in Christ go awaiting the Second Coming of Christ. See John 14:1-4. A striking point from the Luke 16 narrative is that Paradise could be seen from the place of torment: I wonder if that is part of the punishment.

Well, these are only a very few thoughts but I hope they will help a little. The most important point to remember was made by the Lord Himself when He said to His disciples, **"And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I forewarn you whom ye shall fear;**

Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast you into Hades, yea, I say unto you, Fear him". Luke 12:4,5. But thinking of things we can understand now, can you imagine what it would be like to be in a place where there was no light, where murders, muggings, robbery, rape, and all other evil actions were the order of the day and every day. Where there was no love, compassion, understanding; where no child, trustingly, puts its hand into yours. Where there was no laughter and one could not feel the warmth of fellowship. That's HELL. And if that weren't enough, there's the torment continually. Well might the rich man want Lazarus to go to earth and warn his brothers.

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

## THE DENOMINATIONS

### 8.—THE METHODIST CHURCHES

John and Charles Wesley were brought up in the old High Church tradition by their father in the rectory at Epworth. As undergraduates at Oxford they were prominent in the movement for more frequent celebration of the Lord's Supper and the regulation of the devotional life, and received the nickname 'methodist'. But it was on May 24th, 1738, that, in the room in Aldersgate, John Wesley 'felt his heart strangely warmed', and so began the great Evangelical revival of which he, his brother Charles, and their friend George Whitfield, were the leaders. From that day until his death in 1791 he continued his amazing career of covering thousands of miles on horseback and establishing Methodist Societies in every part of the country. He himself translated not a few German hymns and wrote a few of his own, but the great hymn writer of the movement was his erratic brother Charles, than whom there has been no greater hymn writer. Within a couple of generations the whole face of England had been changed. It is now generally admitted by sound historians that the movement saved England from the kind of bloody revolution which swept over France, and it certainly saved religion in this country from the deathly apathy which gripped it at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Wesley had no desire to separate from the Church of his birth, nor did he regard himself as having done so. It was the stupidity of the Bishops and clergy which drove the Methodist Societies outside the pale of the established Church. Had wiser counsels prevailed, Methodism would have been a movement *within* the Church of England. But, by the end of the century, Methodism was established in almost every part of the country as a separate community.

#### *Division*

In the early years of the nineteenth century the Methodist Church suffered the fate of others. There were serious splits. First, the Methodist New Connexion split from the parent body. This was followed by the Bible Christians, mainly a Cornish movement; the Free Methodist Church, mainly in Lancashire and the north; the Independent Methodists, and the Wesleyan Reform Union. The Primitive Methodists, who became strong in the industrial areas of the north, claimed not to be split but to be in the true succession of the Wesleys, from whom the parent body (Wesleyan) had departed. Early in the present century the Bible Christians, the methodist New Connexion and the Free Methodist Church united to form the United Methodist Church, and in 1932 all the main Methodist bodies united in one Church, with the Independent Methodists and the Wesleyan Reform Union left outside. The Methodist Church in this country reported a membership (December 1961) of 723,529; ministers (with supernumeraries) 4,517; local preachers, 22,304. World membership is 19 millions.

#### *Government*

In this country the Methodist Church has a presbyterian form of government; in the U.S.A. an episcopal form, but without any theory of Apostolic Succession. In this

country the Churches in each area comprise a circuit over which there is a Superintendent Minister. Circuits send delegates to the District Synod, and Synods send representatives to Conference, which is the governing body of the Church. Conference meets in two Sessions. The first is representative, consisting of an equal number of Ministers and laymen. The second is ministerial. In the U.S.A. much the same organisation exists, except that Bishops preside over Districts and there are six Regional Conferences, five on geographical lines and one to include the black members.

### *Doctrine*

In the Deed of Union in 1932 Methodism is thus described: "The Methodist Church claims and cherishes its place in the Holy Catholic Church, which is the Body of Christ. It rejoices in the inheritance of the Apostolic Faith, and loyally accepts the fundamental principles of the historic creeds and of the Protestant Reformation . . . The doctrines of the Evangelical Faith, which Methodism has held from the beginning, are based upon the Divine Revelation recorded in the Holy Scriptures. The Methodist Church acknowledges this revelation as the supreme rule of faith and practice. These evangelical doctrines to which the preachers of the Methodist Church, both Ministers and Laymen, are pledged, are contained in Wesley's Notes on the New Testament and the first four volumes of his sermons". Methodism is nothing if it is not evangelical. Arminianism is its theology as opposed to Calvinistic doctrines of election. It has also had from the beginning a definitely sacramental side, witnessed to in Charles Wesley's hymns as well as in John Wesley's teaching, but lost sight of in the nineteenth century. There are welcome signs of the recovery of this element.

### *Worship*

In worship many Methodist Churches are hardly distinguishable from the run of Free Churches, except that there is often greater warmth and more fervent hymn singing. But there are still some Churches which use the Anglican Prayer Book in one service of the day, and in many Methodist Churches a modified form of the Anglican Communion rite is in use. There is a Service Book and a Book of Discipline issued by authority. In all Methodist Churches, so far as I know, Communion is received kneeling. As in all Free Churches, however, preaching is something real, and the Methodist Church gives a greater place to lay preaching than any other Church, nor is the pulpit in the same Church occupied Sunday after Sunday by the same man. In each Church Stewards take the place of Deacons in a Congregational Church. Ministers are ordained at Conference by other Ministers, and infant Baptism is practised.

W. Robinson.

## SCRIPTURE READINGS

Jan. 3	Lev. 24:10-23	Matt. 5:27-48
Jan. 10	Dan. 6:1-16	Matt. 6:1-18
Jan. 17	1 Kings 4:21-34	Matt. 6:19-34
Jan. 24	Prov. 14:1-12	Matt. 7:1-14
Jan. 31	1 Sam. 15:10-26	Matt. 7:15-29

### THE OLD LAW & THE NEW TEACHING

Jesus taught: "You have heard that it was said by them of old time. You shall not commit adultery. But I say unto you . . ." (5:27,28). "It has been said. Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement:

but I say unto you . . ." (5:31,32). "Again, you have heard that it has been said by them of old time, You shall not forswear yourself, but shall perform unto the Lord your oaths: but I say unto you . . ." (5:33,34). "You have heard that it has been said, An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth: but I say unto you . . ." (5:38,39). You have heard that it has been said, You shall love thy neighbour and hate your enemy. But I say unto you . . ." (5:43,44). Of course, in each case we should go on to study carefully exactly what He said.

Jesus had also taught: "Think not I am come to destroy the law, or the

**prophets: I am come not to destroy, but to fulfill**" (5:17). To me it is clear. Jesus' teaching went far beyond the old law. It revealed a higher standard. As one writer has commented: "The Ten Commandments forbid murder: but the Sermon on the Mount goes further and forbids anger. It says in effect that to be angry with a man is just as bad as to murder him. The Ten Commandments forbid adultery: but the Sermon on the Mount goes further and forbids even the desire to commit adultery. It says in effect that to have this kind of desire is as bad as the thing itself. The difference is very important. The Ten Commandments are concerned only with a man's outward actions; the Sermon on the Mount is concerned with his inmost feelings and desires. The Ten Commandments would be satisfied if a man abstained from murder, however much he wanted to kill someone else; and if a man abstained from adultery, however much he wanted to commit adultery. The Sermon on the Mount lays it down that what we want to do is quite as important as what we do, even if we do not do it". But the question might be asked: Why did God not introduce this new teaching at the time He gave the Law? The answer, in short, is that man was not ready for it. He had to be prepared for it and the Law did just that. I think there is a parallel between the growth of mankind and the growth of an individual. Ask yourself, what would happen to a child if faced with a Higher English paper in Primary School?

#### **The Lord's Prayer**

We read in Luke's gospel: "**And it came to pass, that, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, one of the disciples said unto Him, Lord teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples. And He said unto them, when you pray, say, Our Father . . .**"(11:1,2). It, of course, was the same prayer as recorded by Matthew, except for the words: "**For thine is the kingdom and**

**the power and the glory, for ever. Amen**". Scholars have questioned the authenticity of the whole of this doxology because many of the ancient manuscripts omit it. (I leave it to the reader to undertake his own research on the matter as space precludes my making detailed comments.)

This so-called Lord's Prayer is well-known to most of us, I am sure, because we had to recite it repeatedly at school. Sadly it became a vain repetition, exactly what Jesus wanted us to avoid (6:7). Nowadays, the prayer is seldom heard or discussed in churches of Christ, which is a pity, I think, because there is so much to learn from it.

One thing that immediately strikes me about this prayer is the absence of I, me, my and mine. A lot of people today have I-trouble, but they did not get it from reading this prayer. I also like the fact that the prayer begins with God and, therefore gives Him His proper place. The first three petitions are for the hallowing of God's name, the coming of God's kingdom and the doing of God's will. Thereafter, the disciples' needs and requests are dealt with.

Forgiveness is dependent upon our forgiving those who have wronged us (6:12). In other words, to be forgiven we must be forgiving. William Barclay has written: "The connection between human and divine forgiveness is deeply ingrained into New Testament thought. The parable of the unforgiving debtor clearly lays it down that an unforgiving man can hope for no forgiveness (Matt. 18:23-35). As a man judges others, so he will be judged himself and in matters of mercy he will get what he gives (Matt. 7:1,2; Mark 4:24; Luke 6:37,38). It is the merciful who will receive mercy (Matt. 5:7). 'Judgement is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy' (James 2:13)."

Jesus said: "**And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil**" (6:13). R. E. Nixon has written: "This

seems to mean, 'Do not let us be put to the ultimate test', with *deliver us from evil* (not in Luke) an explanation of that. Evil may mean the evil one. It is in the final trial that men are particularly tempted to apostasy (cf. 24:9-13)."

### THE TWO WAYS

Jesus spoke clearly of the two ways (7:13-14). Let us ask the same questions of each. What is it? **It is the broad way.** Who are in it? Sinners in the sight of God. Why is it broad? Not because it was so designed by God, but simply because the vast majority of mankind is walking in it. Where does it lead? It leads to destruction. Again, what is it? **It is the narrow way.** Who are in it? Those who are righteous in the sight of God. Why is it narrow? Not because God so designed it, but simply because the minority of mankind is walking in it. Where does it lead? It leads unto life.

Please note the narrow way has to be found, no one is going to stumble into it. This is what Isaiah meant when he wrote: "**And a highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness: the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein**" (35:9). Actually, the way is a person. Jesus once declared: "**I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man comes to the Father, but by me**" (John 14:6). A careful study of the book *The Acts of the Apostles* shows that the early saints were known as *The People of the Way*. Dear reader, in which way are you walking? Are you with Satan on the broad way, or with Jesus on the narrow way?

### ROCK OR SAND

Everyone in this world is either building his life on a foundation of sand or on a foundation of solid rock. Jesus said: "**Therefore, whosoever hears these sayings of mine, and does them, I will liken him unto a wise man, who built his house upon a rock . . . And every man that hears these sayings of mine, and does**

**them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand . . ."** (7:24-27).

The hymn writer put it this way: "On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand, All other ground is sinking sand!"

Ian S. Davidson,  
Motherwell.

## NEWS FROM THE CHURCHES

**Kentish Town, London:** We held our Anniversary Meeting in the 3rd October, 1992, when brother Ian Davidson, Motherwell, was our speaker. We are very grateful to Ian for coming such a long distance, and for the excellent lesson he gave us. We were all very encouraged and uplifted, and the time spent together was most profitable, both socially and spiritually. Thanks are also due to all those who supported us at the meetings, and those who did so in prayer but who were unable to be with us in person.

Sister Dorothy Proud (Sec.)

**Kirkcaldy:** Ruth and Reg Coles have returned from Papua New Guinea, and are meeting with the church in Kirkcaldy. They are staying with Ian and Sheila Moyes, 9 Massareene Road, Kirkcaldy, Fife. KY2 5RS. Tel.: 0592 268533, while they try to find a permanent place to live. I will pass on their new address as soon as I have it. Please keep them in your prayers.

Our Annual Social is scheduled for 17th April, 1993. God Willing.

Ruth Moyes (Sec.)

### TIMES OF MEETINGS

The church at Mayfield (Easthouses) wish to intimate a change in the times of meetings, and that during the winter (provisionally) the Breaking of Bread Meeting will now be at 11.00 a.m. and the Gospel Meeting at 5.00 p.m.

M. Finlay

**OBITUARY**

**Hindley, Wigan:** We regret again to record the passing of one our members: Bro. Tom Hart, aged 88 years. On Lord's Day 25th October, he was present at the Lord's Table, although very poorly indeed, and died the following Thursday. For a considerable while, his daughter and son-in-law (Bro. and Sister Farrow) have brought him in his chair to the morning meeting. Tom has been a wonderful example to us all: being of a quiet and unassuming nature, and we shall certainly miss him. It was said of him (years ago) that he was one of the best door-keepers we ever had. To Bro. and Sister Farrow, and the family, we extend our very deep and sincere sympathies, and pray that the "God of all comfort" may be their stay. This writer took the funeral service.

Leonard Morgan

**OPEN LETTER TO THE CHURCHES**  
Dear Brethren,

I have had one of my sermons printed and have ordered for myself 1,000 copies; and later, another 250. The church in Argyle Street have placed an order for 2,000.

The title of the message is:

**The Love of Christ**  
(Eph. 3:19)

Copies of this message have been sent out to the churches and individuals, and I am inviting brethren to share, if

willing, in sending out the messages in your area.

The Printer is willing to print (for a minimum of 250 copies)

"This Message is given with the Compliments of The Church of Christ Meeting at....."

and

"We Invite You to come to our Gospel Meeting, Lord's Day at ....."

"A Warm Welcome Awaits You"

Ring Tel. No.....

250 copies £60; 500 copies £100;

1,000 copies £140

**ZIMBABWE APPEAL**

Gratitude and joy and relief will be felt in Zimbabwe as the result of your generosity and compassion in response to the appeal to help the drought stricken Christians there. A total of £2,550.00 has now been raised and sent to brother H. F. Short to buy meal-meal (food). The appeal is therefore closed. Thank you very much to all who gave so freely. Fifteen mm. of rain had fallen by the end of October; that will have disappeared as it hit the ground, so the position is very serious. Watch the news and pray for rain.

God bless you in your effort to feed the hungry.

Matt. 25:40.

Max Taylor.

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