

# *The* **SCRIPTURE STANDARD**

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

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## THREE ALTERNATIVES

The question as to whether life exists on Mars has intrigued mankind for generations. In recent weeks we have marvelled at the success of America's scientists in landing a Viking spacecraft on the planet (some achievement in itself) and we have been amazed at the fact that coloured television pictures have been beamed back to earth and laboratory experiments carried out on site. Remembering that all this has been accomplished on territory so far away that the spacecraft, travelling at quite enormous speed, took eleven months to get there. I suppose that it is a passing commentary on the state of society that the press coverage of this historic and scientific milestone amounts to a few lines tucked in beside the weather forecast whereas the trial of John Stonehouse, M.P., gets a full page and a half. I shall, in my ignorance, be surprised if life is found on Mars, or any other planet for that matter. It may well be that God has other creatures on other places in the vast universe, with different laws from ours, but I get the impression especially from statements like the one which says that Christ was God's only Son, that the earth is the only place to have received God's visitation.

Apart from creating the earth and all it contains God has visited the earth countless times and in divers fashions has spoken unto men, but in these recent times has come in the person of His only Son. Indeed God has so loved the world that He has given His Son so that mankind need not perish but can have everlasting life. Jesus did not travel the prodigious distance here, as apparently did the angels, but was born here. With the passage of time man has stopped believing that God has visited the earth and even less now does he believe that God originally made the earth. Jesus by virtue of the fact that He was born here (for good reasons) and born of a woman, (mankind) takes His place amongst the sons of men and must, solely by His own merits, qualify for the affection and attention of mankind. Thus it is that when men consider Jesus, briefly and casually though that may be, they place Him into competition with other of the illustrious sons of men (in a religious context) such as Buddha or Muhammad. Men are inclined to consider Christ, Buddha and Mohammad together and alongside one another, notwithstanding the vast gulf that we see between Christ and all others. This is probably because Gotama Buddha has a vast religious following, as has Muhammad. Is there any valid comparison between Christ and the others? — I suggest not in the least. There never has been a greater prophet as John the Baptist but even John paled into insignificance when Christ appeared (like the way the moon fades when the sun rises).

Take for instance, as just one example of the difference, Christ's teaching concerning Himself. In John's gospel we read that the Jewish leaders were intent upon killing Jesus, "because...

he claimed to be equal with God" (John 5:18). On another occasion Jesus said, "Before Abraham was born, I am..." and this sounds like bad grammar until we remember that "I AM" was the title by which God identified Himself to Moses at the burning bush (Ex. 3:14). Jesus was claiming to be God by this title and the Jewish leaders who were arguing with Him knew it. As a result they tried to stone Him, for stoning was the penalty for blasphemy. In various passages, such as the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats (Matt. 25) Jesus spoke about man's final destiny and calmly asserted that it was He, Jesus, who would be Judge of the entire world at the end of time. When we recall that those to whom He was speaking recognised only God as the Judge of mankind then we see just how far reaching was the claim Jesus was making. When the disciples worshipped Jesus (Matt. 14) and when Thomas fell down before Him saying, "My Lord and My God" (John 20) Jesus calmly accepted their worship. The vast difference between His attitude and that of the apostles when men wanted to worship them can be seen in Acts 14.

Paul and Barnabas were horrified when the men at Lystra tried to worship them knowing that God only is to be worshipped and that for men to accept worship was blasphemy. Jesus said, "he that hath seen me hath seen the Father". These were claims that Buddha or Muhammad could never have seriously made. Men must decide if Jesus was guilty of blasphemy or did He justify His claims? Jesus also said, "I am the way, the truth and the life, no man cometh to the Father but through me". (John 14) and "I am the light of the world" (John 9). These statements came from the One who personified humility, they were not boasts but were mere statements of truth calmly made. Muhammad and Buddha claimed merely to be messengers of the truth. Muhammad was the 'Prophet of God' according to his claim - Jesus claimed to be God. Gotama became "The Enlightened One" (for this is what the word 'Buddha' means) but Jesus claimed to be the source of truth. Buddha is thought of as a teacher - not a Saviour.

Was Jesus what He claimed? Men have claimed to be deity many times in the world's history. It has been said that when a man claims to be deity there are but three constructions to place upon him. He is either mad, or he is a liar or he is telling the truth. Apparently there is no fourth alternative. Herod Agrippa (in Acts 12) claimed to be a God as did some of the other Roman emperors. Either we accept Jesus as God or we number Him with the world's lunatics and liars. The only way to decide this question is to examine the life of Jesus as revealed in the New Testament and then make up our minds. Those who lived at the same time of Jesus, especially his enemies, watched Him closely, and vast numbers came to the conclusion that His claims, though incredible, were true. They were forced to this decision by the sheer quality of His life - by the combination of His wisdom, compassion, strength and transparent goodness. At His trial not a word could be said in criticism of Him and false witnesses had to be paid. His executioners proclaimed His innocence and the Centurion said, "Truely this was the Son of God". Pilate could find no fault in Him. Peter, who was a close follower of Christ later said, "Christ also hath suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we should follow His steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth. Who then reviled not again: when He suffered He threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously" (1st Peter 2). Jesus stayed two days at Sychers Well and we read that "many of the Samaritans believed because of His own word, and said unto the woman, Now we believe not because of thy saying, for we have heard Him ourselves, and know that this indeed is the Christ, the Saviour of the world". And what of the testimony of God Himself who at our Lord's baptism said, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased", and at the transfiguration of Moses. Elias and Jesus, said concerning Christ (as against Moses and Elias), "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased, hear ye Him" (Matt. 17).

Not only is there no comparison between Christ and other religious leaders (or misleaders) but Christ towers far and above the very best of any of the sons of men of whatever century. The teachings of Christ, the death (sacrificial) of Christ, the miracles and mighty works of Christ, and most of all the resurrection from the grave of Christ separates Him for all time from comparison with any man or men. Charles Lamb, the writer, was on one occasion in his study with some friends and they were discussing some of the world's great men. I wonder what we should do, said one, if some one of these great men were to come into the room just now? Well, said Lamb, I suppose that if Shakespeare or Napoleon or Alexander The Great or Caesar

were to come in we would all stand up. If Jesus Christ was to come in we would all kneel down. Probably the vast difference between Christ and Buddha or Muhammad is best illustrated by the fact that the devotees of many of the large religions make pilgrimages to the burial places of the founders of such religions — the followers of Christ rejoice in pointing to the empty tomb.

EDITOR.

## TALKS ON THE TABERNACLE

### No. 3 The Way into the Holy Place

IN our last talk we noted that the first apartment of the tabernacle was the Holy Place, typical of 'the sanctuary and the true tabernacle', the Church of the Living God.

#### There was one way in

The worshipper desiring to enter must pass through the gate in the east end of the outer court. The Lord Jesus said 'I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved'. 'I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me' (John 10:9; 14:6). That flings a barrier across every other way. No road, but by Me. Not through earthly priests, whether of Roman, Greek, or Anglican order. Not by works of our own righteousness, 'Jesus is the true, the only living way'. 'Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, wherein we must be saved' (Acts 4:12).

#### The Altar

Passing through the gate of the court, the worshipper was challenged by the brazen altar: the appointed place where sacrifices, according to Divine instructions, must be offered. This testified to the fact of sin, and the need of atonement. That has been learned by the whole human family. Behind the crudest and most cruel sacrifice offered by the lowest savage tribe is the consciousness of the fact of sin, and that only life, or blood which is the life, can atone for sin.

The sacrifices of the Old Covenant, continually repeated, testified to the need for, and pointed to, a greater and better sacrifice than these. That brazen altar pointed to Calvary. The contrast is vividly set forth in Hebrews 10:11-12, 'Every priest (under the old covenant) standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins, but this man [Jesus, our High Priest], after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat on the right hand of God.' The priests of the old dispensation stood, because they had continual work to do; but Jesus sat down, having by His one sacrifice made an adequate atonement for sin, and 'obtained eternal redemption for us'.

'But Christ, the heavenly Lamb,  
Takes all our guilt away,  
A sacrifice of nobler name,  
And richer blood than they.'

#### The Laver

'The Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Thou shalt make a laver of brass, and his foot also of brass, to wash withal: and thou shalt put it between the tabernacle of the congregation and the altar, and thou shalt put water therein'. Many writers on the tabernacle either ignore the laver, or claim that there was no special significance about it. Yet God said, 'Aaron and his sons...when they go into the tabernacle of the congregation, they shall wash with water, that they die not' (Exodus 30:17-21).

So there was a death penalty for disobedience in that matter. The laver was between the altar and the door of the tabernacle. The antitype, baptism, is placed by the Lord between the Cross and the door of his Church.

All in New Testament times who believed that Jesus the Christ of God died for their sins on Calvary were immersed in water into His name, and into His body, the Church (see Acts 2:37-41; 16:30-34; 18:8 etc).

In that inspired commentary, the Epistle to the Hebrews, the writer says: 'Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us through the veil, that is to say, his flesh: and having an high priest over the house of God: Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water' (Hebrews 10:19-22). Commenting on this passage, Dean Alford, an eminent Church of England clergyman and scholar, wrote: 'There can be no reasonable doubt that this clause refers directly to Christian baptism. The bath of water of Ephesians 5:26, and the bath of regeneration of Titus 3:5, are analogous expressions: and the express mention of bodies here as distinguished from hearts before stamps this interpretation with certainty'. The margin of Revised Version gives 'laver' in passages named above.

Writing of 'Titus 3:5, Professor J. A. Beet (the eminent Methodist) said: 'These words I do not know how to interpret except as a reference to baptism'.

If there is any other way into the true holy place, the Church, where does the New Testament show it? But daring innovators, despite all God's warnings, have dared to tamper with this Divine order. Some have removed the laver, and taken it past the altar, the Cross, outside the court. They take a babe who knows nothing of Jesus or Calvary, and taking a few drops out of the laver sprinkle them on its face, and declare that its sins are remitted, that it is regenerated. and is made a member of Christ, and is grafted into the body of Christ. These are the folks who tell us who plead for believer's immersion into Christ for the remission of sins, that we make too much of baptism. Those who believe that a few drops, or an ocean of water, can make any difference to an unconscious babe in the sight of God hold that there is more in water than any of us ever imagined in the wildest dream we ever had. Baptism, unless preceded by sincere faith and genuine repentance, is of no value whatever. Others have pushed the laver through the door into the holy place. They affirm that a person is saved, pardoned, and born again, before baptism; and then strangely refuse these saved regenerated people a place at the table in their assembly until they have been immersed.

When we depart from the divine order we create confusion. That order as given by the Lord Jesus is: 'Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved, but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned' (Mark 16:15-16, R.V.). After the giving of that commission that order was never violated during the apostolic age. Some try to make it read: 'He that believeth is saved, and he can be baptised afterwards, if he so desire'. Others act as if it read: 'He that is baptised is saved, and he can later be taught to believe on the Lord Jesus'. When we keep to the Divine order, we are on solid ground, and 'all other ground is sinking sand'.

Standing by the gate of the court, we hear Jesus say: 'I am the door', 'I am the way'. We come not to the altar, but to the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. When we have heard not merely the history of the Cross, but gripped the mystery of it, that He loved us and gave Himself for us: then, because He commanded it, we are baptised into Christ, into His death, we have His own assurance of pardon and acceptance: and pass into the Holy Place, the Church, to worship and serve as He has appointed.

W. CROSTHWAITE

## IT IS MY PSALM — IS IT YOURS ?

THINK — Of stepping on shore, and finding it HEaven!  
 Of taking hold of a hand, and finding it God's hand.  
 Of breathing a new air, and find it celestial air.  
 Of feeling invigorated, and finding it immortality.  
 Of passing from storm and tempest to an unbroken calm.  
 Of waking up, and finding it Home.

PERFECT CONTENTMENT — "And I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever" Psalm 23:6.  
 It is with a feeling of sadness that I invite you still once again to share a walk with me and your

Lord to the "pastures of tender grass, then on to the "waters of quietness". This month's mediation brings to an end this series of articles on this well-loved Psalm. I trust you also have enjoyed our fellowship, as we have gleaned from the precious word of God, some of "the unsearchable riches of Christ". We continue with our theme of Perfect Contentment, "and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever". Psalm 23:6. The story is told of a woman dying in the poor-house. Bending over her, the doctor heard her whisper, "Praise the Lord". "Why Auntie, how can you praise God when you are dying in a poorhouse?" "Oh Doctor", she replied, "It's wonderful to go from the poorhouse to a mansion in the skies". A mansion in the skies, no strange house in a foreign country, but a mansion that for the child of God, will be an ideal home, where our Father's will is done, His love manifested, and His majesty acknowledged. A place of endless light and glory, a home without a shadow, a home of no separations, a home of enlarged service, a home of love, joy, peace, contentment, truth, beauty, righteousness. So we continue our theme, and suggest:—

#### THE HOUSE OF THE LORD – THE HOME OF THE REDEEMED

"That in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus." Ephesians 2:7

"For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known". 1 Corinthians 13:12

"As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness". Psalm 17:15

"Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" 1 John 3:2.

"Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore." Psalm 16:11

"And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads". Revelation 22:4

"After this I beheld, and lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, Saying, A-men: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. A-men. And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me. These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes" Revelation 7:9-17.

Alexander Maclaren said:— "There we shall have no valley of the shadow of death, no ravenous beasts to prowl round the fold and pounce upon the wanderers from the flock, no dark gorges, no stony ways, no thirsty deserts, no straying in the wilderness and tearing the fleeces among thorns, no losing sight of the shepherd, and panting with panic fears. There the Shepherd needs no weapons — neither rod to smite nor sling to defend. If we give ourselves to his gentle guidance here, where all these terrors and hindrances are, He will bring us thither where there are not: and if, with stumbling steps we try to follow Him as we best can in this rough road, He will seek us when we wander, and restore us when we faint, and bring us to the one fold, where we shall be near Him, and at rest for evermore".

#### THE HOUSE OF THE LORD – THE PLACE OF UNHINDRED WORSHIP

"Far, far away like bells at evening pealing,  
The voice of Jesus sounds o'er land and sea,  
And laden souls, by thousands meekly stealing,  
Kind Shepherd, turn their weary steps to Thee."

"Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name: worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness".  
 Psalm 29:2

"O worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness: fear before him, all the earth". Psalm 96:9.

"O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker". Psalm 95:6  
 "But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him". God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth".  
 John 4:23-24

I suppose over the years we must confess that there has been in our experiences many distractions as we have sought to worship our Lord. Time and again our minds have failed to concentrate on the one we have come to worship, the one who has redeemed us with His precious blood. We know of course that we should sit at His feet, and listen to the wonderful words of life, and be enraptured and captivated by His beauty and glory, which would fill our hearts with the overflowing love of God. Yet, even when one has been around the table of the Lord, our minds have been wandering, instead of sharing an intimate fellowship with our Saviour, we are away, not to the pastures of tender grass, but to the pastures of the family, home, work, problems, worries, business, possessions, and a host of other things.

C.H. Spurgeon said:—"The common fault with the most of us is our readiness to yield to distractions. Our thoughts go roving hither and thither, and we make little progress toward our desired end. Like quicksilver, our mind will not hold together, but rolls off this way and that. How great an evil this is! It injures us and, what is worse, it insults God. What should we think of a petitioner if, while having an audience with a prince, he should be playing with a feather or catching a fly?"

"Yet, Lord alas! what weakness within myself I find;  
 No infant's changing pleasure is like my wandering mind.  
 And yet Thy love's unchanging, and doth recall my heart  
 To joy in all its brightness, the peace its beams impart"

Is it any wonder that one preacher said:—"I am hungry to find myself without a plank between me and Christ". Ah, but what a difference, up yonder, no devil, who is a murderer, and a liar, John 8:44 a deceiver, 2 Corinthians 2:11, an angel of light, 2 Corinthians 11:14, one who went about as a roaring lion 1 Peter 5:8. Let us rejoice that our arch enemy will be finally dealt with:—"And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him" Revelation 12:9.

We have a message for the redeemed ones:—"And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away" Isaiah 35:10 "And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders' and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever. And the four beasts said, A-men. And the four and twenty elders fell down and worshipped him that liveth for ever and ever". Revelation 5:11-14.

I trust that the precious blood of the Lord Jesus, and His righteousness, will avail for all God's children, so that we can have perfect contentment, and that we can say "and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever".

This month's exercise:— Read Revelation 7:9-17 and read our own Psalm once more and remember the 26 personal pronouns. May the Lord's richest blessing be your portion.

LEONARD MORGAN.

# CORRESPONDENCE CLASS

## THE EARLY HISTORY OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

or

## THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

### Questions on Chapter 2

1. State what you know of the Day of Pentecost.
2. Who were 'they' (verse 1)?
3. What filled the house?
4. What was the purpose of the gift of tongues? (See Mark 16:9-20, 1 Cor. 14: and Isaiah 28: 11-12).
5. What is new wine, and what is Peter's argument against their being drunk?
6. What period of time is covered by Joel's prophecy as quoted by Peter?
7. Give an outline of Peter's address (verse 22-36).
8. In answer to the enquiry Peter did not say 'Believe'. Why? Give Peter's answer and explain.
9. Had God predetermined that the Jews should reject Jesus as the Christ? (see verse 23).
10. What was the gift of the Holy Spirit? (verse 38)
11. Why is it better to read Holy Spirit than Holy Ghost?
12. Give in your own words verses 41-47.

Answers, which should be written on one side of the paper only, should be returned by the end of September to : Edward Jess. 34 Charles Street, Penicuik, Midlothian, EH24 0HH.

Please observe the following rules in connection with the Correspondence Class :—

### RULES

1. Try to have them in my hands on the date stamped on each set of questions.
2. Write your answers in ink on one side of the paper only.
3. Leave a space, about one inch, between your answers.
4. Put your name on the back of each page of your answers and put your name and address on the last page.
5. Put the number of the set of questions at the top right hand corner of the first page.
6. Number each answer distinctly.

## WHICH IS THE FIRST COMMANDMENT

JESUS was asked many questions of which this one, "Which is the first commandment" was the outcome of a series. In Mark we read that when Jesus was in the temple, "There came to Him the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders. And say unto Him, By what authority doest thou these things?" In return He too asked a question, "The baptism of John, was it from heaven or of men?" They talked among themselves — "If we shall say, From heaven; he will say, Why then did ye not believe him?" Yet they did not say from men, for they feared the people who counted John a prophet, so they replied "We cannot tell". Jesus answered, "Neither do I tell you by what authority I do these things". The Pharisees and Herodians asked, "Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not?" Looking at the penny which they brought at His command Jesus 'Whose is this image' and upon being told that it was Caesar's said, 'Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.

Next the Sadducees who did not believe in resurrection, had a question concerning a point of law. 'What if a man dies and his childless wife marries and is widowed by each of his seven brothers, still being childless; whose wife would she be in the resurrection?' Jesus told them that they erred knowing 'not the scriptures, neither the power of God. For when they shall rise from the dead, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage; but are as the angels which are in heaven'.

'And as touching the dead, that they rise'. Jesus continued, Have ye not read that God told Moses, 'I AM the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'; proving that He is not the God of the dead but the living.

Having overheard the questions and answers and being compelled to acknowledge Jesus' wisdom and divine understanding, one Scribe asked, 'Which is the first commandment of all?' The reply – 'Hear, O Israel; The Lord OUR God is one Lord. And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with thy mind, and with all thy strength: THIS IS THE FIRST COMMANDMENT'. Jesus quoted and emphasised Deuteronomy chapter 6, verses 4-5 to a Jewish Scribe and showed us the four springs – the heart, soul, mind and strength from which love can flow to God, as well as being manifest in daily actions.

'With all thy heart'. The Bible gives over a hundred references to the heart as a centre of feeling. 'Sing for joy of heart, God looketh on the heart. Blessed are the pure in heart. Let not your heart be troubled'. Whichever view we hold the heart is all important to life; therefore we are giving our life's best to God.

'With all thy soul'. God breathed into man the breath of life and he became a living soul. A personality covered by a shell which we call the body, yet so much more abiding. 'What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his soul?' 'What shall a man give in exchange for his soul? The Psalms give us some of the finest expressions of human experience. 'As the heart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God, My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God'. The Scribe was told to love God with ALL THY SOUL.

'With all thy Mind'. How can we love with the mind? Reason and knowledge can be the foundation from which love develops. God gave us a mind – to think, choose, accept and LOVE and God claims it back again.

'And with all thy strength'. Love expressed by action as well as worship – Being not only an offering of Praise but a sacrifice of time and comfort – a giving of physical power.

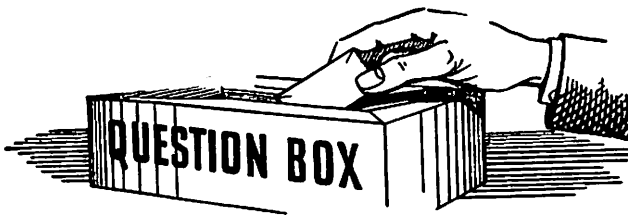
'The Lord our God is ONE Lord'.

This was true to the Old Testament Jew but to the New Testament Christian there is a fuller revelation of God: a Three fold understanding.

'THE LORD OUR GOD IS ONE LORD', 'THIS IS LIFE ETERNAL'.

AMEN.

By the late Bro. F. R. W. KIMBERLEY.




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Conducted by  
Alf Marsden

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WE are a very small group of Christians who meet here. Could you suggest ways of increasing our membership?

IT is true to say that those of us who meet with larger groups of Christians have little or no idea of the problems and frustrations of those who have to meet with small groups. The tragedy of our day is that groups seem to be getting smaller and it is particularly saddening to see once numerically strong groups declining into pathetically small ones. Obviously there are pertinent reasons for this state of things, and those reasons we shall explore as we seek to answer this question.

When we begin to speak about small groups, it seems to me three situations are envisaged:

- 1 A group is small because the witness is just being started in that locality.
- 2 A group is small because it has remained small over a considerable period of time.
- 3 A group is small because it has become small over a period of time.

I have enumerated these situations because I believe that each situation has to be handled in a different way if progress is to be made.



### The New Witness

There is one truism that hardly needs stating: there are not enough witnesses being started in new localities. Such witnesses are usually started in one of three ways:—

- 1 An evangelist moves into the area.
- 2 A family moves into a new locality because of employment.
- 3 Selected members from a well-organised large assembly begin to operate in a new area near to the parent assembly.

Whichever of the above three ways is relevant, the cardinal thought must be that a Church of Christ will be set up in that locality.

There are pitfalls, of course. In the case of (1) the evangelist should not choose the locality because it would seem to be a good area in which to live. If he were a married man with a family then he would be less than human if he didn't think about such things as the children's education, etc., but having said that, the principal reason for being there at all is to win souls for Christ; once that takes on a secondary role then the witness will be something less than effective.

With regard to (2) the motive behind the change of locality for the sake of employment must be closely examined. In these days, escalating unemployment may force a family to move, but even so, once the family unit has settled into the new social environment ways and means should be found of trying to start a christian community. The family who moves solely to secure a better financial and social position may have a problem. Once financial and social position take precedence over christian requirements, then in my opinion there can be little hope of success in spreading the witness and gaining souls for Christ. It is not unknown for christians in such circumstances to take refuge with other religious groups.

Personally, I have always favoured (3), but to my knowledge it has been practiced little, if at all, in this country. Perhaps this is because the assemblies who would seem to be able to do this suffer from the fact that only a small percentage of the numerical strength are really effective and active workers. The advantages, though, are many, but space does not allow us to go into these at the moment; perhaps a little later, if anyone is sufficiently interested.

Whichever method is used, the ground should be prepared as well as is possible. We should ask ourselves such questions as: 'What religious groups are operating in the area now?' 'How do they seem to be faring?' 'What resources have we, and how can we best employ those resources?' 'What are our priorities and targets?' 'What help can we expect?' It is only when we begin to plan that we shall see the real possibilities. After all, did God have a plan for the redemption of mankind? Of course He did, and He followed it with meticulous care.

### The Static Witness

What can be said about this except that the chances are that it will always be static. It may be that I have already mentioned some of the reasons for this. Or it could be that a handful of christians have worked hard over the years and have become discouraged by lack of success. Or possibly they have not tried hard enough, or as effectively as they could.

But what is to be done? I would suggest action along these lines. Examine quite critically the resources that you have in time, availability, commitment, and expertise. Make it known that especially in a small group there can be no worthwhile commitment less than 100%. Iron out quickly any differences that may exist with in the group, because it is fatal to the witness if differences do exist; ensure, though, that this is done in a careful manner, but if there is obstruction don't hesitate to speak and act forcefully.

Have you any friends who are interested but are not members? Select one and work on that person, but be realistic in the selection. What you need in a small group initially is an extrovert, one who can meet people and influence them to some degree by sheer personality. Remember! the addition of one person to a group, if that person is of the right calibre, can be more valuable to you than twenty others who merely make up a number. Set yourselves a realistic target, say, in the next twelve months, but remember you must try to achieve the target; if you do this, you will find that you do achieve the target. Let your decisions be decisions in which the whole

group participate; in that way, if people are involved in making the decisions they will at least try to make them work. Finally, in the words of our late Bro. W. Crosthwaite, 'Never lose heart'.

### The Declining Witness

There may possibly be other reasons, but I tend to blame the leadership of a group for this state of affairs, There is really no one else to blame, is there? If things go wrong it is always the fault of the loser.

Let's quote a few examples to see if the above statement is a true one. You may say to me, 'Well, we would have been alright if the assembly hadn't been split because of internal strife'. But if an assembly suffers from internal strife, whose fault is it: I say without qualification that it is the fault of the leadership, if there is any. The trouble should have been sorted out before it reached the critical stage, but too often family ties are stronger than our relationship with Christ.

What about the assemblies that have achieved much over the years but are now resting on their laurels. History can never fulfil the present let alone the future. If there is not a steady infusion of new blood into the group then it will decline; age and death will see to that. Efforts must be planned to interest people, particularly young people, in the gospel. The leaders of a group should initiate such measures: in short, they should always be planning for a future which they may not see but which will be assured for others. It is a sad, sad, spectacle to see once-proud assemblies dying but I blame the leaders. Members who are not engaged in some desirable external activity will engage themselves in undesirable internal activity.

### Conclusion

I have tried to examine the question from a comprehensive standpoint rather than a limited one because I do not know all the details of the group in question, but I trust that what I have said will be of general use in reminding us all that no army ever reached its objective by marking time.

(All questions please to Alf Marsden, 377 Billinge Road, Highfield, Wigan, Lancs.)

## SCRIPTURE READINGS

OCTOBER 1976

3-1 Kings 4:21-34	Matthew 6:19-34
10-Proverbs 9	Matthew 7:1-14
17-Deut. 13:1-11	Matthew 7:15-29
24-Leviticus 14:1-20	Matthew 8:1-17
31-Exodus 14:15-31	Matthew 8:13-24

### WORRY AND ITS ANTIDOTE (6:19-34)

THE phrase 'take no thought' in the A.V. has caused misunderstanding for we cannot live normally without thinking of the immediate and sometimes the distant future, so the R.V. changes it to 'be not anxious', thus bringing it up to date. Our first few verses this month are a warning from the Saviour against a basic cause of worry, namely acquiring material wealth. The heaviest burdens of the soul come with possessions. They involve responsibility, and bring danger with them partly because they incite to envy, and that is one of the greatest evils in the world. Pilate

knew that for envy Jesus had been delivered up to him but that was envy of character and worth, not material possessions. Whereas Christians are instructed to work for their living (1 Thess. 4:11,12; 2 Thess. 3:7-11), amassing wealth is forbidden. Our wealth is acquired rather by giving and by suffering (see the beatitudes), and is heavenly. The application of the verses on the light of the body is somewhat hidden and its connection lost through the words 'single' and 'evil', which can be better rendered 'generous' and 'mean' as indicated by the uses in other passages of the Greek words concerned. The connection with what goes before and after is clear because treasure, generosity and riches are related. If we are set upon getting, a mean attitude blinds us to the needs of others and puts 'mammon' where God ought to be - the absolute master! Our basic physical needs are food, drink and clothing and the provision for these is made by God in His creation. Jesus wants His followers to keep these in their place by putting His kingdom and His righteousness first in their thoughts. His emphasis on the creative and sustaining power of God

corrects a disposition to think everything depends upon us. A poet has written "The future if Thy gift, I would not lift the veil that hangs twixt it and me". Certain it is that we can waste strength of mind and body by worrying about the future thus taking up tomorrow's burden as well as today's. An old friend had a notice on her mantelpiece "My life has been full of troubles, most of which have not happened". We ought not to pass from this passage without noting that the wisest man, Solomon, could not, neither now can man reproduce anything so wonderful as the simplest item in the animate or inanimate creation.

#### The Golden Rules (7:1-14)

Verse 12 is the Golden Rule in summary, but we have example and extension of it, which bring it so close if we will give careful thought to the question of judging others. Our human nature somehow makes us normally feel a certain satisfaction in discovering the faults and failings of others, and Jesus bids us with the comparison of the grit of sawdust and the beam make sure of our own perfection which we never have, before we try to correct another. We need to keep a watch on our attitudes. In contrast to this we need to be wisely silent about holy things when we know they cannot be appreciated. We have to be in earnest when we are seeking blessing from God being assured He will give us what is good for us, and that it may be a hard path to tread. The word as reported by Luke on another occasion is 'agonise' (strive) Luke 13:24.

#### Warnings for Disciples

The apostles themselves in particular but all true disciples of Jesus in all ages will meet false prophets. The counterfeit is more effective if it is very like the true, and Satan can be disguised as an angel of light as well as acting as a roaring lion. Thus the church has faced disruption through the work of apparently good men moved by good motives. The Judaisers of Paul's day came with loyalty to Moses the man of God. The apostasy came about through efforts to make the church more powerful. All kinds of well-meaning people have schemed to improve the pattern. They have to be tested by their fruits, and so complicated has sectarianism become that the simple-minded can scarcely be expected to judge right from wrong. There is the divine

standard — now the New Testament. The profession of submission to Jesus — 'Lord, Lord' — must be followed by doing the will of the Father if it is to have approval on the last day. This is further enforced by the parable of the houses built upon rock and sand. Have WE taken heed to what Jesus said in this sermon". Has the revolution taken place in your heart and mine?

#### Miracles of Personal Touch (8:1-17)

While Jesus must have healed thousands by touch and word, we do have the touching accounts of individual cases. Here are three, each with its different aspect. It seems strange that a leper who must have known of Jesus as the Healer, approached Him with an almost challenge as though he were not sure of His compassion; We suppose lepers would not accompany the multitude because of their very restricted movements. Touching him would make Jesus 'unclean' according to law, so the cleansed leper was sent to the priest according to that same law to be declared 'clean' and to offer his sacrifice. Matthew specifically mentions the 'touch' and the 'shew thyself'. For some further details of our second personal encounter read Luke 7:1-10. A centurion's slave was at point of death. That centurion was a good master and a good man. He knew of Jesus, 'believed in His power, and received the reward of his faith in immediate response. Jesus was constrained to forecast the acceptance of the Gentiles by the exercise of similar faith, in the future kingdom, and the final kingdom. The unbelief already developing in His own people occasioned His statement of the fate of the unbelievers. Healing in this case was by word at a distance. How different is the healing of Peter's mother-in-law, and how quick the response of gratitude and love. Here also we learn from the other gospels. Jesus took her by the hand, lifted her up and the fever left her. This was a personal touch indeed. Have we thought what a privilege it must have been to be held by the hand of the Son of God? This was a sabbath day (Mark 1:29) and when that sabbath ended at even, the crowds came with all their sick ones, devil and disease possessed and He healed them all — still His personal touch!

#### Would-be Followers

The day must have been one of great activity and Jesus was tired out, so 'gave com-

mandment' to cross the sea. Two, one a scribe interrupted with declarations of loyalty. The scribe was straitly warned of hardship, the other of need of immediate resolve. We are not told of their reaction. Were they on the boat in the storm?

#### Power over Wind, Weather and Devil

The departure was hurried. They "Took Him just as He was" and He fell asleep "in the stern on the cushion" (Mark 4:36). The storm arose and in dire distress He is awakened. At His word the winds and the waves were calmed. The disciples must have been very deeply impressed, and they were to have an even greater demonstration at the other side of the lake when faced with the untameable demoniacs. Jesus calmed their fury. Then they witnessed the spectacle of the herd of swine rushing by demon possession into the sea. It was essential for those who should become apostles that they should know the power of their Lord and the power of their enemy. The other evangelists portray the transformed man, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind (Mark 5:1-21). That power which had held the man in its spiritual bondage had power by permission on the swine, but Jesus had power over them all. R. B. SCOTT.

Error in last month. JOSHUA should have been JOSEPHUS.

## NEWS FROM THE CHURCHES

**Hereford, Church of Christ:** Owing to the generosity of the Slamannan District, Bro Paul Jones was able to spend the month of June with us, giving us a time of grand fellowship and enlightenment from the scriptures. He also had the opportunity to preach to interested

people, who we pray may become the fruits of his labour at a future date.

**Longshoot, Scholes, Wigan:** On Sunday July 4th the brethren at Longshoot had the joy of witnessing two additions to the Lord's body when Ann Smith and Linda Marsden were baptised into Christ. We thank God for their Decision to follow Jesus, and trust that they may experience the peace and joy which comes with faithful service in His Church.

D' MELLING

**New Cumnock, Ayrshire:** It is with great joy that we write to say that we were spiritually uplifted to hear of a young man giving his life to Christ. Jim McGinn, younger brother of Tommy, was immersed into Christ in the river Clyde near Abington, the same night.

At that time he was attending a camp for young christians and others interested in these things,

May the Lord bless our young brother in the path in which he has started and all the glory be given to God through His Son, who gave Himself for us. H. MCGINN.

#### EVANGELIST'S ADDRESS

Please contact Brother Paul Jones. at;—  
C/o. 23 Gadle Braes, Peterhead, Aberdeenshire, during September.

C/o 'Mamre' King Edward Street, Portknockie, Banffs. during October.

#### COMING EVENTS

**Kentish Town:** 105th anniversary of opening of HOPE CHAPEL, October 2nd and 3rd. SATURDAY 3 p.m. and 6 p.m. Tea 5 p.m. SUNDAY 10 a.m. & 11 a.m., 6.30 p.m. SPEAKER: Brother J. SINCLAIR, Tranent-Later: Mission with Brother Leonard Daniell, Bristol, R.B. SCOTT.

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