

The SCRIPTURE STANDARD

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

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LOOKING GOOD

Here in Britain we have been watching, (on T/V), the new American President George Bush make his victory speech and extend a hand of reconciliation to his vanquished opponent, Michael Dukakis. The long election campaign fought by these two, even by American standards, has been described as 'dirty' with many bitter exchanges ('liar' and 'criminal-coddler' being samples). Many here have watched the campaign, over the months, with absorbing interest, and many are sorry that Jesse Jackson had not been the Democrat choice. However, there it is, and we can but wish George Bush well in his awesome responsibility as he presides over that great country, and pray for his early success in solving some of the immediate problems involving those friendly and generous people.

To a mere observer on this side of the Atlantic, what seems to have emerged again, in these presidential elections, is the vital importance of the candidates looking good in the media, and particularly on T.V. It seems as if the actual policies of the candidates didn't matter too much: it was the personal 'image' on the screen that was all-important. Every nod and gesture was analysed. Dukakis was regarded as 'cold' (and described as the kind of man who would turn up to tell you that your mother had died) and was also lacking in 'passion.' Mr. Bush was thought to be a 'grey' or colourless man and was exhorted to be more 'folksy.' In the eyeball-to-eyeball confrontations between the candidates, in the T.V. debates, every flicker of the eye and stammer of the lip was caught by the close-up lens and immediately relayed into millions of homes. Every syllable uttered was analysed and re-analysed and every smile and gesture orchestrated to achieve the most telling impact. Mrs. Dukakis eventually had to vouch publicly for her husband's 'passion' and Mrs. Quayle had to try and keep her husband away from microphones. Policies and promises took second-place to personalities. Political experience and personal integrity gave place, it seemed, to the main consideration of 'looking good'. Indeed Dan Quayle's main attribute, it appeared, was that he was a "Robert Redford look-alike" (hotly denied by Mr. Redford). In short, being handsome was more important to the electorate than being competent, and playing fair was of less consequence than greying hair; ability less vital than affability. One wonders if Mr. Abe Lincoln would have dyed his greying locks to please a precocious public. Elections in Britain are also moving in the same direction: i.e. emphasis on the personality rather than the policy, and each party now spend vast sums on the Publicity Agents and image makers.

This is, of course, a sad reflection upon us, the general public, for it shows that we are shallow enough to respond to this. We are more impressed by appearances

than by actualities. We seem to prefer that which is artificial and fun; to that which is real but sombre. The human animal much prefers a pleasant illusion to a dull reality. The gullible public, have, in every generation, fallen for the charming rogue and are prepared to accept a man of dubious character provided he is handsome, witty and amusing. We might not be prepared to buy a second-hand car from him: but he is 'very popular'. This flaw in the human make-up extends even into the church.

OUTWARD APPEARANCES

James could say, "My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ with respect to persons. For if there come into your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment: and ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing and you say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place: and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit thou here under my footstool. Are ye not therefore partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts." (2:1). These brethren fawned upon the rich and influential, and despised the poor man. They were impressed by the gold ring and expensive clothes. We might think nothing much has changed. We are still impressed by the man who steps out of the Rolls Royce and speaks with a cultured ('Prince Charles') accent. But this should have no place in the church. "Do ye look on things after the outward appearance," asks Paul. This he asked of the Christians at Corinth for they not only challenged his apostleship but, it seems, despised him on account of his 'image' — his personal appearance. They said that his letters "are powerful and weighty; but his bodily presence is weak and his speech contemptible." (2 Cor. 10:10). Paul goes on to add that he was not in the business of making personal comparisons, or to contrast himself with any of the brethren, for that was what the Corinthians were doing ("comparing themselves among themselves" v.12) and that was "most unwise." Thus the rebuke: "Do ye look on things after the outward appearance? If any man trust to himself that he is Christ's, let him of himself think this again, that as he is Christ's, even so are we Christ's" (v.7). This was something for the Corinthians to chew upon, and something for us as well.

Quite apart from the 'top preacher' syndrome in some parts of the world, we have the serious problem that some personalities are bigger than the message: and their words carry more weight than the scriptures. Over the years almost every religious denomination has had its champion, past or present, and we can perhaps, think immediately of names, ranging from Calvin to Wesley; Luther to Spurgeon, even Charles T. Russell to Dr. Billy Graham. The writings and speeches of some of these men carry far more weight, in certain quarters, than does God's word itself: such is this personality cult in religion. It is not the first time, in discussion, that someone has said, "Yes, that's what the Bible says, but I will have to wait and see what my minister says." Paul in his controversy with the Corinthians over their evident tendency to be entirely influenced by personal appearance (mentioned above) urged these Christians that they "Might learn not to think of men above that which is written that no man be puffed up for one against another." (1 Cor. 4:6). No man's words are ever to be considered superior to "that which is written." No man is ever to be unduly extolled by his brethren; and certainly not to the extent that any one be 'puffed up', or that some be 'for' and others be 'against' another. Paul goes on (v.9-14) to show that if any group of men deserved human accolade it could probably be the apostles, but the very opposite was the case. God had sent the apostles into the world last (or least) 'Appointed to death' and 'made a spectacle of the world' not only to men but to the very angels. The apostles were "fools for Christ's sake, weak, despised, in hunger, in thirst, buffeted, in nakedness, with no certain dwelling-place, labouring with their own hands, reviled, made to be as the filth of the world and an offscouring of all things." This was how Paul and the other apostles saw themselves and, in many cases, how they were treated by their fellowmen, and even by some in the church. A

striking contrast to the honour, awe and reverence bestowed upon personalities in the religious world today, and particularly upon men like the Pope.

This lesson for the Corinthians (and for us) ever needs to be re-learned, for no man whatsoever is ever **'above that which is written.'** Paul, we remember, also withstood the apostle Peter "to the face" for he "was to be blamed" (Gal. 2:11) and lightly dismissed the brethren **"of reputation"** domiciled in Jerusalem. That they were considered highly, and held in some reputation, cut no ice with the apostle. Similarly, Paul was quite unmoved by those "who seemed to be somewhat" in the Jerusalem church, or those thought to be important "in conference." And to those "privily brought in" Paul gave no ground whatever "no, not for an hour" (v.5). Why? — **"For God accepteth no man's person"** (v.6). Strong personalities, and men of powerful charisma, in the church, will come and go but God's word remains unimpaired and quite impervious to change. Indeed Jesus said that even **heaven and earth** would pass away, but His words would outlive all that, and remain eternal and indestructible. Thus we do not require to be very bright to realise that Paul had very little time for personality cults in the church. Paul said (earlier in the same epistle) that even if **angels** came down from heaven and preached a gospel that differed in any way from the one he had preached, that angel should **not be listened to**, but rather accursed. The gospel, and God's words, were sacrosanct. "For," says the apostle, "do I persuade (please) men or God"? **"If I pleased men I should not be the servant of Christ."** Paul was no respecter of persons, in the church or out of it.

God is Impartial

In his own time the apostle Peter had also to embrace this truth, although in his case, it required divine intervention and a miraculous vision. Acts Chap.10 describes in detail the intriguing circumstances which befell the apostle and, which eventually wrung from his lips that wonderful (and to him, incredible) truth, **"That God is no respecter of persons, but in EVERY NATION he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted with Him."**

Gentiles, especially, have cause to rejoice at this wonderful news. God is entirely impartial and anyone, in any nation, can please God by fearing Him and working out in their lives, God's righteousness.

- (1) God is impartial in that He has accounted all men to be under sin. **"All we, like sheep, gave gone astray."** **"There is none righteous, no not one."** This is the true state of affairs, but in mans' world those who were rich and influential would pay to have this truth covered up. But God is quite impartial. He states the bare truth, and includes crowned heads; monarchs, Presidents, Dictators as well as the humble ploughboy.
- (2) God is impartial in providing just One Saviour. If we are to be saved from our sins it must be through the paschal Lamb supplied by God. Jesus said, **"No man cometh to the Father but by Me."** There are no 'special dispensations' afforded to the academics and intellectuals of this world. There are no ways of getting into heaven by 'the back door' or by 'pulling strings' or any other of the privileges in mans' world. **"But those who come to Jesus, God will no wise cast out."**
- (3) God is impartial in providing just one plan of salvation. The gospel is God's power unto salvation, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. Jesus parting words to His disciples were, **"go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved ..."** (Mark 16:15) In mans' world when benefits are being given out, the poor and weak are usually jostled aside and pushed to the end of the queue, by the rich and the strong. In God's world the common people are more likely to hear God gladly and certainly the gospel is for all, alike.

- (4) God is impartial in many other ways. He has provided just one book, the Bible, by which all men might be enlightened and to which all men must conform. He has provided just one church into which all men must come to be saved. Just as He is ONE God so He sent into the world just one spirit, even as we are called in one hope of our calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, for God is above us all, through us all, and in us all (Eph. 4:5). He has also provided just one bar of justice and has appointed one Righteous Judge, to whom we shall all give account. There shall be no special tribunals held in camera or 'rigged' juries, but all will have righteous judgement. The picture many have of the Judgement is an austere God on a lofty throne sending most to hell and a few to heaven, whereas the truth is that God will merely be giving us what we have chosen. What we, in effect, have asked Him to give us. We chose to live as we did. We chose to ignore God's warnings or to joke about them. God will give us what, by our lives, we have asked for.

CONCLUSION

God is impartial: so should we try to be. God is no respecter of persons: neither should we be. The world is entirely given over to being influenced by appearances. Even if a person applies for work, he, or she must reach certain personality standards and have "an attractive appearance"; or "an outgoing personality"; or "requisite experience" or be "smart and intelligent."

The world puts us all into classes, brackets and categories depending upon our background, our old school, our occupation, our I.Q., our model of car (last year's or 'old banger'), our social circle or clubs, where we go for holidays, our accent etc. etc. With God these considerations are of no consequence whatever. God looks upon the inside and cares little for our human, artificial and whimsical values. Thanks be to God that He is no respecter of persons and welcomes into His presence the lowest of the low, the dregs of humanity, the halt, the lame and the blind. God sent His Son into the world to save sinners and placed no limits on the depth of those sins. Christ promises that truly repentant sinners can leave their great burdens of sin behind in the watery grave, of baptism, and they can emerge to walk in newness of life, as innocent as the new born babe. Praise be to God.

In all the wonderful, and not so wonderful, discourses of Mr. Bush and Mr. Dukakis we were treated, by the media, to many little 'sound-bites' of these speeches highlighting the many promises they were prepared to make. Let's close with an even better 'sound-bite' from Isaiah and an even bigger promise, **'Come, let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow, though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.'** (1:18).

EDITOR.

GLEANINGS

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

MASTER!

"Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master." (John 20:16)

"There is a prodigious power in a single word, when that word is large in its meaning and fragrant with rich associations. The name "Jesus" suggests salvation from the curse of sin. The name "Christ" describes Him who was anointed to be His people's King and Teacher. The word "Immanuel" signifies that God is with us in the person of His Son. There is another name which we do not so often employ, but which is a consecrated bundle of rays illuminating the relation of Jesus Christ to His own ...

“That word “Master”, is a profound one, as an expression of love and loyalty, a deep well from which we may draw up plentiful suggestions both of duty and delight. Jesus himself acknowledged the relation when He said “Ye call Me Master! and ye say well, for so I am. One is your master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren.” He has a right to this title.

MASTER, SPEAK! O SPEAK TO ME!

“MASTER, speak! Thy servant heareth, Waiting for Thy gracious word,
Longing for Thy voice that cheereth; Master let it now be heard.
I am listening, Lord, for Thee; What hast Thou to say to me?

Speak to me by name, O Master, let me know it is to me;
Speak, that I may follow faster, with a step more firm and free,
Where the Shepherd leads the flock, in the shadow of the rock.

Master, speak! Though least and lowest, let me not unheard depart;

Master, speak! For O Thou knowest all the yearning of my heart,
Knowest all its truest need; speak and make me blest indeed.

Master, speak: and make me ready, when Thy voice is truly heard,
With obedience glad and steady, still to follow every word.

I am listening, Lord, for Thee; Master, speak! O speak to me!”

MASTER, WHERE DWELLEST THOU?

“Again the next day after, John stood and two of his disciples; And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God! And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, what seek ye? They said unto him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master,) where dwellest thou?

He saith unto them, Come and see, They came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day: for it was about the tenth hour.” (John 1: 5-38).

SPEAK, O BLESSED MASTER

“SPEAK, Lord in the Stillness,
While I wait on Thee;
Hushed my heart to listen
In expectancy.

Speak, O blessed Master,
In this quiet hour;
Let me see Thy face, Lord,
Feel Thy touch of power.

For the words Thou speakest,
They are life indeed;
Living bread from Heaven,
Now my spirit feed!”

THE MASTER IS COME

“And when she had so said, she went her way, and called Mary her sister secretly, saying, the Master is come, and calleth for thee.” (John 11:28)

JESUS, MASTER, WILT THOU USE

Jesus, Master, whom I serve, Though so feebly and so ill,
Strengthen hand, and heart, and nerve All thy bidding to fulfil;
Open thou mine eye's to see All the work Thou hast for me.

Lord, Thou needest not, I know Service such as I can bring;
Yet I long to prove and show Full allegiance to my King.

Thou an honour art to me, Let me be a praise to Thee.

Jesus, Master, wilt Thou use One who loves Thee more than all?

As Thou wilt! I would not choose: Only let me hear Thy call.

Jesus, let me always be In Thy service glad and free.”

Selected by Leonard Morgan.

NO ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

In one of the largest Australian newspapers we read this interesting item recently: *"The End* – My attention has been drawn to this advertisement by a car manufacturer: 'The car I now bring out is pretty close to finality. I do not believe that a car materially better will ever be built.' The year of the advertisement was 1912!"

It is rather sad when any person, company or society bogs down in the decaying grasp of complacency. When anyone thinks he has "arrived" most of the best things of life begin to elude him. There is always room for improvement within our lives. The irony of this truth is that often the more talented person continues to advance, while those who really need to improve couldn't care less. Sooner or later the favourite hobby of lazy folk – who see no need for improvement – is to sit back and criticise the very people who are humbly pressing on.

One of the enigmas of our earthly sojourn is the failure by many to grasp the opportunities that each new day affords. For those of us who believe the Bible, this sin is inexcusable. Call it indifference, delay, procrastination, or whatever you will – it simply means that we are wasting the very substance of life itself.

In Psalms 89:47 the writer exclaimed: "Remember how short my time is." It would be well for each of us to ponder that expression in our hearts. It is of the utmost importance how we spend our time. We dare not squander it on lesser things and certainly not on matters that quench our spirituality. What are we doing for God? Will the result of our days upon the earth reverberate into ever-widening circles of influence? Or, will we be so useless that no ripple is made by us upon the stream of time?

In relation to the centuries that are past and eternity beyond, each of us has "just a few more days" to magnify Christ in our temporal bodies (Phil. 1:20). The greatest single deterrent to the advancement of New Testament Christianity is the "no room for improvement" complex.

Far too many churches, elders, preachers and other members of the Lord's army have allowed Satan to convince them that they have arrived at the apex of achievement. Standing on the shining summit of their subtle egotism such foolish people bask in the fading glory of yesterday, and in the nebulous fancies which only day-dreams bring. But, reality and today haunt them.

One of the worst points involved in misusing time is the fact that we can repent concerning it but we cannot recall those moments that are gone forever (Rom. 6:21). There is scarcely an adult who does not wish he could live again certain periods of his life. If such were in the realm of possibility, many of us would diligently strive to be more useful to Christ "the second time around."

Time is fleeting; the moments are passing. There is so much to do for Jesus and our time is so limited. As the years rush swiftly by, let us be wise enough, by God's grace, to make every second count for Eternity. It is wonderful to know that Christians can "still bring forth fruit in old age" (Psalms 92:14).

How long we live is an inferior consideration when compared with how well we live. Just compare the longevity of Methuselah with the 33 short years of the Lord!

There is room for improvement in all of our lives. May we redeem the time by growing in the grace and knowledge of the Saviour (Eph. 5:16; 2 Peter 3:18).

May this be the very day that we begin to improve as Bible teachers, gospel preachers, overseers, husbands, wives and children.

An unknown poet left these words for our serious consideration:

"The life that counts must aim to rise
Above the earth to sunlit skies;
Must fix its gaze on Paradise –
That is the life that counts."

Do not live or die in vain. Make your days glow for God!

J. Ramsay.

THE BLESSING OF FRIENDSHIP

Among the great blessings of life there is nothing that excels the blessing of friendship. If you had everything else in the world except friends, would you esteem that a happy situation? Really there is not enough of anything else to make people happy without friends.

Probably there are hundreds of people travelling the road of life, sighing in the loneliness of lost affection, because their friends of other years are gone.

It is not when the sun shines brightly on life's pathway, but when clouds gather and darkness falls, that friendship is most helpful to us. Solomon says, "A friend loveth at all times" (Prov. 17:17). God will bless your life in prosperity and adversity. And again Solomon says, "There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother." This is preeminently true of Christ.

Friendship is the most attractive attribute of human character. And here is the most striking expression of friendship I have ever seen. It is the language of Ruth to Naomi. "Entreat me not to leave thee; for where thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people and thy God my God. Where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried. The Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me" (Ruth 1:16,17).

Probably there is nothing that contributes more to man's happiness than friendship. We esteem enmity a misfortune. But the best of men sometimes have enemies. Jesus and Paul had enemies. And enemies are never a pleasure, but always a pain. The writer of Psalms said, "As with a sword in my bones mine enemies reproach me" (Ps. 42:10). And what David experienced was not different from other people.

Friendship is reciprocal. "A man that hath friends must show himself friendly" (Prov. 18:24). But some people are so dumb that they think those they mistreat should be their friends.

How To Make Friends

Dale Carnegie wrote a book entitled "How to Win Friends and Influence People." It was a best seller, but I doubt if any one ever learned how to make friends by reading that book. Friendship is a divine concept, not human.

If a person practised everything taught in Carnegie's book, that would not make him the friend of God. The Bible offers a shorter and more effective road to the same goal. Abraham became the friend of God by doing the will of God. And Jesus said, "Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you" (Jno. 15:14).

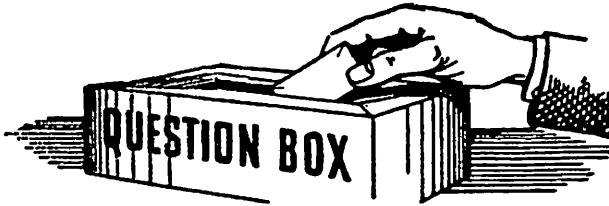
There is no other way to be the friend of Christ. There is no substitute for doing his will. We cannot be the friends of Jesus by the way we think or the way we feel. If we are negligent, we cannot be the friends of Christ. We cannot be his friend if we worship the way we think instead of the way he commands. We cannot be Christ's friend if we teach that some things he has commanded are non-essential. And if we practise vices he has condemned, we cannot be his friend.

Jesus has made the way of duty so plain, that we cannot be mistaken about whether we are his friends or his enemies. He said plainly that men were his friends when they did what he commanded them.

We cannot be the friends of Jesus by occupying a neutral position on important subjects. Jesus said, "He that is not for me is against me."

The Lord may lead us into some dark places, but by faithful obedience, there is a propitious outcome. God is our friend when we do his will without reluctance or delay. The will of God is pre-eminent. The will of man is subordinate. The human will must be in subjection to the divine will. Are you friendly?

E.M. Davies.



Conducted by
Alf Marsden

“There seems to be a contradiction in what is said about John the Baptist in Matt. 11:11. He is referred to as the greatest and then as the least. Surely this is a contradiction.”

There are no contradictions in the Bible. If we believe the Bible to be a collection of the words of men and **not** the Word of God then I suppose we could expect contradictions, but if we believe it to be the Word of God, then how could we expect the One who is the source of all truth to contradict Himself? We need, then, to put contradictions out of our minds, and by careful Bible study seek to **understand** what God is saying to us. Relative to the question, we shall need to see the sense in which the words greatest and ‘least’ are used, and it might help if we consider other instances where these words are used.

John The Baptist

There is no doubt at all that John was a very courageous and brave man. He confronted the Jewish leaders with the words, “O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come” (Matt. 3:7 but read on). One of the first clues, however, to the answering of our question is given by John when he said, “he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear” (V11). In comparing future status he said, “He must increase but I must decrease” (John 3:30). Later, when John, languishing in prison, sent his disciples to ask Jesus if He was indeed the Messiah, he was not trying to enhance **his own** status; he was concerned because the progress of the Kingdom was not as he, John, had anticipated. (See Matt. 11: 2-6).

The New Situation

When situations change, a change in attitude is usually required of people who have to cope with the new, emerging situation. This does not always happen. In the twentieth century, when emergent nations have been given political freedom in order to unify with each other and with the world at large, other nations have ‘held their breath’ when they have seen such emergent nations trying to cope with the new situation by applying old, traditional tribal laws. In the case of the Jewish leaders, the emerging Kingdom was met by stern, unyielding attitudes, particularly in the application of the Mosaic Law.

However, the Jews had completely mis-understood what God had been telling them for centuries under the Old Covenant, and, incidentally, what Jesus was teaching (new wine, old skins, new cloth, old garments etc.). John was unique, not only as a person but also as a prophet (see Luke 7:28); he was the ‘greatest’, because Jesus said that he was. But John was at the end of the old order, heralding in the new, the Kingdom of God. What Jesus is saying to His disciples is that in estimation the **least** in this New Kingdom is greater than the **greatest** in the old order. Now this may say something about personalities, but it says much, much more about the superlative value of the New Kingdom when contrasted with the Old Covenant.

Fulfilment And Requirement

Jesus teaches His disciples, however, that they are not to disparage the Mosaic Law; even though imperfect, it had been given by God, and it had brought them to

the point of the ministry of Christ. Even though **incomplete**, it had to be seen as moving the development of God's Will in the right direction until the **complete** should come. Jesus acknowledges the continuity of the spiritual principle under-pinning the Mosaic Law, and calls upon His disciples, and us, to cultivate a deeper and more searching obedience to those principles, "For I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:20).

The mistake the scribes and Pharisees made was to teach the people the **externals** of the law – ceremonial washings, animal sacrifices, etc. – while forgetting the weightier matters – love, mercy, compassion. It was an appreciation of the latter which prompted Jesus to say, "Do not think that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil." (Matt. 5:17). Jesus then goes on to remind His disciples that they had been **brought up** under the Law, and that it had enshrined God's will up to **that stage**. He then warns them that in their zeal and enthusiasm for His **new** teaching they should not abandon **all** that they had learned before; as He said to them, "Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the **least** in the kingdom of heaven; but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called **great** in the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:19). They had to **do and teach**; isn't that the right way round?

Yes, the Jewish leaders and teachers had left out the prophetic elements of the Old Testament, and had substituted rigid, external observance for moral holiness. Well might Jesus scathingly denounce them. We should ensure that He doesn't find the same in us. Do we want to be of **low** or **high** esteem in His Kingdom?

Matt. 11:12 is an interesting verse, "And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." A free interpretation of this verse would be, "strong men **force** their way into the kingdom and take it by force." The Sermon on the Mount makes it clear that just seeing to the externals is no use whatsoever; we have to **strive** to enter in. When strong, resourceful men see something of inestimable value they will strive to apprehend it. How different from weak, peripheral Christians who are content with the crumbs from the rich fare on the tables.

Humility

In Eph. 3:8 Paul speaks about the power of God extended to him in the Gospel; he says, in some amazement, "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." Dear brother, sister, do you hear that? Less than the least! Paul had a great estimation of his fellow-saints; he held them in great esteem. He had endured much himself, but when he compared himself with many who had borne the burden and heat of the day, and in many cases had died for the Lord, he was moved to say that even the least of these was greater than he. This was not mock humility; Paul was not a weak man, on the contrary he tells us that he had wrestled with the beasts at Ephesus, but he was so intent on being like his Lord that he esteemed others more highly than himself.

Paul was careful, though, to defend his authoritative Apostleship. In 2 Cor. 11:5 he says, "For I suppose I was not a whit behind the very chiefest Apostles." Later in the same letter he says, "for in nothing am I behind the very chiefest Apostles, though I be nothing." There was no arrogance in saying this; by the grace of God he was what he was. Nor was there mock humility in thinking himself nothing; he looked upon it as an occasion for the Gospel. This great Apostle had truly learned the spirit of Christ: "For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more." (1 Cor. 9:19),

All of this makes us understand the greatness of the Church, because the Kingdom is the Church. We, who were nothing, have now been exalted to the highest in Christ Jesus. In the eyes of the world we may be less than the least, but in the eyes of God we are something special. Didn't He send Jesus to die for us?

(All questions, please, to Alf Marsden
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LOVE THE LORD

(Psalm 116: 1-12)

"I love the Lord, because he has heard my voice and my supplications"

This verse tells us of great love. Brethren, love has to be the most essential feature in our relationship with God. God's love is the strongest love in all the world. So let us never forget the sacrifice given, that we might live in harmony with God.

"Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; our God is merciful" (v5). What a heart warming verse that is. We see here God's concern toward his own. It tells of God's concern for his people in-gathered through Christ Jesus; adopted by love are we.

Brethren, God makes his love known in many ways; never take for granted the signs; pray often in thanksgiving. We should remember that God's hand is ever near, protecting, guiding and keeping us from harm, through His loving care. Verses 8,9 reads: **"For thou hast delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling."**

"I walk before the Lord in the land of the living."

Beloved remember this, "The nearer to God the stronger the love." In this day and age in which we live, we require great strength of patience, hope and faith, as never before. We indeed live in perilous times.

Verse 10 reads, **"I kept my faith even when I said I am greatly afflicted."** Even in dire straits brethren, we can still experience God's love. A lesson here for all of us. Don't despair! Of course our hope and strength must never rest upon ourselves or mere man: if it does, we will assuredly fail. Verse 11 emphasises this great fact.

"I said in my consternation men are all a vain hope." It is sad, but nevertheless true, the world at large is hurtling towards disaster due to the trust put in man. All history confirms this truth. Praise the Lord our trust is in Christ Jesus!

In life we will doubtless fall foul of every-day happenings, that's a fact of life. But look for comfort in the book of Psalms. Let us, like the words of the old song, **"Walk in our fathers footsteps."** In this we share and experience the true strength of God's love.

Build for the future by keeping close to God. **"What shall I render to the Lord, for all His bounty - to me"?** (v12).

A. P. SHARPE,
Newtongrange.

Seen Through

The anniversary speaker, long advertised, was taken ill and had to send a deputy, who began his address by explaining that he was only a substitute and then felt it necessary to define the word.

"If you break a window," he said, "and put a piece of cardboard in place of the broken pane, that is a substitute."

At the close of the service one of the deacon's thanked him for stepping into the breach at such short notice and added: "You were no substitute, you were a real pane."

“LIKE THE THIEF ON THE CROSS”

So many times when we are trying to teach people the importance of doing all that God has commanded relative to salvation, we encounter the objection that they desire to be saved “like the thief on the cross.” It does not matter how plain to them such passages as Acts 2:38; 22:16 or I Pet. 3:21 may point out that baptism is essential to our salvation, they are determined that if the thief on the cross was saved, then they can be saved just like he was.

We are not interested in debating whether or not he had been baptized (either by John’s baptism, per Matt. 3:5-6; or by Christ’s baptism, per Jn. 4:1-2), although indeed he may have been. The fact remains, that if Jesus was willing to forgive him of his sins at this point, all that preceded is immaterial. Nor are we debating whether or not he was saved at this point. I believe a study of the passage and similar related passages would indeed imply that Jesus’ statement, “today you shall be with me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43) means He was forgiving the man’s sins and assuring him that He would save him. Nor are we interested in how much he had been exposed to the teachings of Christ, although his comment regarding the kingdom (Luke 23:42) implies he had a better understanding of the spiritual nature of the kingdom than did many of his time.

There is one particular point about this case that does interest me though, and that is why this particular case seems to be the favourite one used by those objecting to the necessity of being baptized in order to have remission of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16). During the life-time of Christ, he forgave many of their sins, as illustrated by the thief on the cross (Luke 23:39-43), the people who were crucifying Him (Luke 23:34), the woman taken in adultery (Jn. 8:3-11), the man who was paralyzed (Matt. 9:2-8), and the sinful woman who anointed His feet (Luke 7:36-50). Why do some people feel that the thief on the cross is somehow different from any other forgiven by Christ during His life-time? Why not be saved like any one of the others as well?

The truth of the matter is that we can not be saved like any of them, any more than we can be saved like those who lived under the Law of Moses. God had specific requirements for those under the Law of Moses, and He has specific requirements of us as well. During the life-time of Christ, He had the authority to forgive sins (Matt. 9:6), and did. The thief was forgiven of his sins by Jesus while he was still alive, just as the others mentioned here were. But that does not make this a pattern for us today, any more than it did for those under the Law of Moses. It was an exception to the rule, and not the rule itself. In Heb. 9:15-17, we find that Christ is the mediator of the New Testament, which is the governing means of our salvation today. The writer goes on to point out, “For where a covenant is, there must of necessity be the death of the one who made it. For a covenant is valid only when men are dead, for it is never in force while the one who made it lives.” Jesus forgave the thief while He was still living, hence it was before His new covenant (the New Testament) went into effect.

What those who appeal to thief on the cross need to find is where anyone *after* the death of Christ on the cross was given salvation without baptism. Paul prayed and fasted a total of three days, yet was commanded, “Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name” (Acts 22:16); Cornelius received the baptism of the Holy Spirit to convince Peter that the Gentiles were indeed to be accepted; yet was commanded to be baptized (Acts 10:47); the eunuch learned from Philip, yet sought to be baptized when they came upon some water (Acts 8:36); and on and on we could go. The thief was not, and cannot be an example for us today! Why not just accept the will of God, and be saved the way *He* desires—it’s the *only* way.

D. P. Ames.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Jan. 1	Isaiah 55	Mark 3: 13-35
Jan. 8	Jer. 5: 20-31	Mark 4: 1-25
Jan. 15	Jonah 1	Mark 4: 26-41
Jan. 22	1 Sam. 16: 14-23	Mark 5: 1-20
Jan. 29	1 Kings 17	Mark 5: 21-43

Blasphemy Against the Holy Spirit

A lot of nonsense has been written on this subject. The words should be read in context. To blaspheme is a translation of the Greek word *blasphemeo* which means "to speak reproachfully, to slander, calumniate, rail at, or revile". In other words, blasphemy is a sin of the tongue and has to do with speaking injuriously of that which is high or holy.

Jesus said: "Verily I say unto you: All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewithsoever they shall blaspheme: but he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Spirit has not forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation: because they said, He has an unclean spirit (3:28-30). W. C. Ketcherside, in his outstanding book *Heaven Help Us*, has written: "What is the unforgiveable sin? According to the context, it is accrediting to satan the power by which Jesus performed His wonderful works. It is saying that Jesus possessed an evil spirit rather than the Holy Spirit ... Why is there no forgiveness for this malign act? The simplest answer is that God has placed it outside the pale of divine forgiveness. It is beyond the limit set for grace. It is the one crime against divine majesty that is outside the circle ... The kind of heart that would engage in such reprehensible conduct will not repent. It is the heart of stone or flint that would willingly see the world of mankind destroyed to justify its own cruelty and gratify its own humanity".

The Parable of the Sower

The Parable is contained in verses 3-9; the explanation in verses 14-20. Jesus lived in an agrarian society, thus the many references in His teaching to

the ways of the countryside in His day. Had he lived in the twentieth century, His parables, of course, would have been very different. How different, we are only left to speculate.

Jesus said: "The sower sows the word" (4:14). It is the word of God that can change lives and produce good fruit. Peter, in his first epistle, spoke of "being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which lives and abides for ever" (1:23). But what can drive out the word? Jesus said: satan (4:15); affliction or persecution (17); cares of this world, deceitfulness of riches and the lusts of other things (19). On the points of that last verse someone wrote: "It is easy to pack life with such a multiplicity of interests that there is no time left for Christ ... The more complicated life becomes, the more necessity there is to see that our priorities are right, for there are so many things which seek to shoulder Christ from out the topmost niche".

There was good soil in which the seed flourished. Please note that if we are really to benefit from the word then we must hear it, receive it and put it into action (4:20). James wrote: "Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent, and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you. Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says" (James 1: 21-22, N.I.V.).

Growth of the Kingdom

The subject of the Kingdom of God is, I think, one of the most important subjects a Christian can study. When I discuss the Kingdom with others, I am always amazed at how ignorant people are of what constitutes a kingdom, etc. But, perhaps, I should not be. For Jesus Himself said: Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a man be born again, he cannot see (understand, comprehend, know) the Kingdom of God" (John 3:3).

Some of the best material on the Kingdom of God is found in Alexander Campbell's book *The Christian System*. One writer recently commented that this

book by Campbell was not well-known in the Churches of Christ, even in America. How sad to read that! If I were on *Desert Island Discs* and asked to choose one book, apart from the Bible and Shakespeare, to take with me to the island paradise then it would be, without doubt, Campbell's *The Christian System*. I never tire of reading it. Incidentally, neither did my grandfather John Sneddon, who all his life was proud to be called a Campbellite.

The point I wish to make about the Kingdom here is this. Just because Jesus spoke about it during his ministry does not mean it was already established. Campbell wrote: "Christ was promised and prefigured before He came: and the Kingdom of Heaven was promised and preached by John, by Jesus, the Twelve, and the Seventy, (who went about proclaiming the glad tidings of the Reign), before the Reign of Christ or Kingdom of Heaven commenced."

When I read the Parable of the Mustard Seed, I am reminded of the statement in Revelation: "And they sang a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed them to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made them unto our God kings and priests (literally, a kingdom of priests): and they shall reign on the earth" (Revelation 5: 9-10).

Unclean Spirits or Demons

Remember, there are many demons, but only one devil. Demon-possession was distinct from normal illness. We read, for example, in Matthew's gospel: "And Jesus' fame went throughout all Syria: and they brought unto Him all sick people that were taken with many diseases and torments, and those who were possessed with demons, and those who were lunatic, and those that had the palsy; and He healed them (4:24).

The demons were personalities, spirits, fallen angels, who, I believe, were released in the days of Jesus to show the power of Truth over the spirit

of error. They knew Jesus (5:7), but their cry was one of knowledge and not of faith. Jesus had power over them, which clearly shows that God's power is greater than their's or satan's.

Are there demons in the world today? Personally, I do not believe so. Paul revealed that Jesus in the end defeated and disarmed the demonic forces and put them back in chains of darkness (Ephesians 4:8; 2 Peter 2:45). The danger today is from the doctrine of demons (1 Timothy 4:1).

A Woman Healed

At present, I am undertaking a study of *Woman in Society and the Church*, so I am especially tuned to any incident in the scriptures featuring women. This woman with an issue of blood touched Jesus and virtue (power, Greek *dunamis*) went out of Him (5:30). Her touch was a touch of faith. It was a touch different to all the others around her. I think there is a spiritual lesson here. One can be in a group which believes is close to Jesus, but never really touches Him in true faith to experience His healing power. An individual can be part of such a group and still be saved. (See Revelation 3:21, for example).

Jairus' Daughter Raised

Jesus of Nazareth proved He was the Messiah, the Son of the Living God by what he said and did. Raising Jairus' daughter from the dead was an act that should have convinced the multitude of the truth. At first they were scornful (5:40), but afterwards were astonished beyond measure (42). And no wonder! A young girl dead and yet brought back to life with the words: "Little girl, I say to you, get up" (5:41, N.I.V.)!

Later, of course, Jesus was to perform an even greater miracle by raising Himself from the dead after being in a sepulchre for three days and three nights. I take great comfort, indeed rejoice, from the fact that Jesus has power over death. As Paul wrote in that famous passage: "O death, where is thy sting? O grave (hades), where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength

of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15: 55-57).

Ian S. Davidson, Motherwell.

SERMON ILLUSTRATION

The revealing the Word by similitudes is very useful and profitable; for it conduces much to make truth go to a man's heart before he is aware, and to impress it upon his memory. Many remember the simile, and so the truth which it conveyed. It is reported of the Marquis Galeacias, a nobleman of great estates, and near of kin to the Pope, that once coming but to hear Peter Martyr preach, by a mere simile that he used, God smote his heart, and made it the means of his conversion. The simile was thus: Peter Martyr in his discourse had occasion to say, men may think very hardly of God and His people, but this is because they do not know Him; as suppose a man a great way off sees a company of excellent dancers, the musicians are playing, and there is exact art in all they do. At the distance he regards them as a company of madmen, but (added he) as he draws nearer and nearer to them, and hears the melodious sound, and observes the art that they use, then he is much taken and affected. So it is with you. You are a great way off, and look from a great distance upon the ways of God, and so you think His people mad; but could you come to observe what excellency is in them, it would take captive your hearts. God blessed such a similitude as this to that great man's heart, so though his wife and children lay imploring at his feet, yet he came to Geneva, and there continued all his days. But we should take some heed here.

1. Similies should be brought from things known.

2. We must not urge similies too far, we must take heed of a luxuriant, wanton wit.

3. And they must be very natural, plain, and proper, or else man will appear in them rather than God.

— *Burroughs, 1599-1648.*

Nothing strikes the mind of man so powerfully as instances and examples. They make a truth not only intelligible but even palpable, sliding it into the understanding through the windows of sense, and by the most familiar as well as most unquestionable perceptions of the eye.

— *South, 1633-1716.*

A proverb or parable being once unfolded, by reason of its affinity with the fancy, the more sweetly insinuates itself into that, and is from thence with the greater advantage transmitted to the understanding. In this state we are not able to behold truth in its own native beauty and lustre; but while we are veiled with morality, truth must veil itself too, that it may the more freely converse with us.

— *John Smith, 1618-1652.*

Deep in our nature there exists a tendency to seek amongst all interesting objects points of resemblance, and when some intuition keener than our own reveals that resemblance, we bow to its truths or acclaim to its beauty. For instance, when human life is compared to the course of a river — cradled in the moss-fringed fountain, tripping gaily through its free and babbling infancy, swelling into proud and impetuous youth, burdened with the great ships in its sober and utilitarian manhood, and then merging in the ocean of eternity — who is there that does not see the resemblance, and in seeing it find his mind richer by at least one bright thought? There may be little resemblance betwixt a clouded sky and the human countenance; and yet when it is smiling, and when that dull countenance opens and lets out the soul, we say that it is shining; and in the metaphor we feel that we have given a new animation to the sun, a new glory to "the human face divine".

This tendency to metaphor, and the universal delight in parables, comparisons, and figures of speech, are no mere

freaks of man's fancy. They have their foundation in the mind and method of Deity, whose thoughts are all in harmony, and whose works and ways are all connected with one another; so that what we call the imagination of the poet, if his reading be correct, is really the logic of Omniscience.

— *Hamilton, 1814-1867.*

NEWS FROM THE CHURCHES

Newtongrange: The Annual Social of the church at Newtongrange was held on the 15th October when a rich time of fellowship was enjoyed by the largest gathering of members and visitors here for a considerable period. The meeting was chaired by Joe Currie and the singing led by John McCallum. Graeme Pearson expressed the opening prayer after which the chairman welcomed the audience to Newtongrange (incorporating into his remarks Psalm 100: 1,2; and Eph. 5: 19) James Moncrieff read Isaiah 53 and Joe Malcolm read Acts 8: 26-39. Solos were sung by sisters May Wilson, Grace Coventry, Joanne Mould and Andrew Sharp.

Two brilliant and very uplifting addresses were given by the young (ish) Brethren John Kneller and Ian Davidson. John spoke of "Grace" with all its depth of meaning, and how the gaze of the Father and the Son ought to be transmitted by all the Christians in the meeting to those, as yet, outside the Kingdom of Christ. Ian took as his subject Seven Josephs in the Bible: from Jacob's eleventh son, with his coat of many colours, through to Joseph (husband of Mary): Joseph of Arimathea and Jesus Barnabas, cleverly incorporating into his address an exhortation to Christians, and also an appeal to our visitors to give their lives to Christ. The singing of the gathering was commented upon by many present, the volume and quality being excellent and heard from a long way off. The meeting was reluctantly closed, with Leslie Purcell expressing the final

prayer. Thanks was given to all those who had participated, and to all who had attended, for making it a very memorable day. Joe Currie (Sec.)

Zomba, Malawi: I am happy to report good progress in the preaching of the gospel in this part of Malawi (Church of Christ Mission) at Namiwawa. Since June of this year we have:— baptised 14 and restored 3 at Macheso: baptised 15 and restored 3 at Makoka: baptised 27 and restored 8 at Chisuzi: baptised 10 and restored 3 at Chikala: baptised 13 and restored 5 at Kathebwwe: baptised 4 and restored 1 at Chidothe: baptised 10 and restored 3 at Chikala: baptised 7 and restored 1 at Chiphoola: baptised 10 and restored 3 at Makhasu. I hope to send further reports.

We would like very much to receive an expatriate missionary from the U.K.

W. F. Khonde.

Kitwe, Zambia: We are pleased to report that there have been 28 baptisms resulting from the Woodhall's preaching efforts. There were 17 in the Copperbelt: 6 were in the Western Province; 4 were in the Northern Province and one at the close of a meeting in Livingstone. These are amongst a steady stream of men and women who are making the good confession and being baptised into Christ.

Angela Woodhall.

OBITUARIES

Wigan, Longshoot: We are sad to report the death of sister Alice Layland, aged 76. Alice had been a lifelong member of the church in Wigan and had been a regular attender at the meetings up to suffering a stroke a few months ago. Her simple faith was admired by all and served as an example especially to the young in the church. We commend her children Joe and Helen and their families, to the comfort to be found in the Lord. We rejoice that we mourn not as those without hope, but in the sure knowledge of the resurrection.

D. Melling.

Kirkcaldy: The church of Hayfield Road, Kirkcaldy is sad to announce the death, on Lord's Day, October 16th 1988, of Bro. Alex. Roberts. Bro. Alex. who was 81 years of age died suddenly but peacefully in hospital.

Although unable to meet with us for some time due to deteriorating health Bro. Alex. was always concerned with the work of the church. He served for many years both as a deacon and as church secretary and acted upon his belief that all things be done decently and in order.

While we sorrow at his passing we rejoice that for him all pain and suffering are ended and he has gone to his reward. We ask that you will remember his widow Sister Lizzie, and his family Bobby, John, Alex., Betty and Janet in your prayers.

Services were held in the family home on Tuesday 18th, lead by Bro. J. Davidson, Kirkcaldy, and in the church building and at the graveside on Wednesday 19th, lead by Bro. A. Gardiner, Sighthill.

"And this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."

T. Steedman. (Sec.).

When anyone has offended me I try to raise my soul so high that the offence cannot reach it.

SOME "DEWARISMS"

Lord Dewar will be best remembered as having done more to relieve the boredom of after-dinner speeches than probably any other man. Here are some of the "Dewarisms" which he has made famous:

Motor cars are increasing by leaps and bounds; pedestrians are surviving by the same process. London is a city of the quick and the dead.

When there is nothing more to be said, some fool always says it.

Life is a one-way street, and you are not coming back.

Many a false step is made by standing still.

Man may be the noblest work of God, but nobody ever said so except man.

Most men are great believers in heredity until the son makes a fool of himself.

The slowest motion picture today is represented by the taxi driver undressing himself in his endeavour to find change.

All women like bargains, but they will never have it suggested that they are wearing a bargain.

PHILOSOPHY

Life is made up of trials with an occasional conviction. To some mothers life is just one darn sock after another. Man reaps what he sows unless he be an amateur gardener.

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