

The **SCRIPTURE STANDARD**

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

Vol. 62 No. 4

APRIL, 1993

HIGH NOON AT WACO

Once again religious cults have hit the headlines. According to press and T.V. reports, a certain David Koresh is claiming to be Jesus Christ (admittedly not an entirely original claim) and, what is perhaps much more surprising, has convinced a large number of otherwise intelligent human beings that he is, in fact, the real thing: the Messiah. Details here at the moment are rather sketchy but, apparently, Mr. Koresh has cobbled together "an extreme sect" armed to the teeth and under siege from the local police authorities at a large ranch in Waco, Texas. The sect members, who are quite fanatical about their leader and willing to die for him in a shoot-out with the police, have amassed a great stock-pile of guns and ammunition in their premises in preparation for the coming "battle of Armageddon". Mr Koresh, himself, seems to be the fairly archetypal leader of such cults; mysterious; moody; volatile; unpredictable; untrustworthy; yet charismatic. He receives, it seems, regular messages directly from God and has, of course, a plurality of wives: he also reels off a constant barrage of quotations from the Bible, especially, as might be expected, from the Book of Revelation. Some reporters have described this sect as an offshoot of the Seventh Day Adventist Church (as many of the sect members are Adventists) but this seems quite unfair and no-one is surprised at the denials made by the Seventh Day Adventist Church.

In recent articles I have occasionally made reference to the gullibility of the human animal and surely this is just one more striking example. How can intelligent, rational and fairly normal members of the public get roped into believing the groundless and preposterous claims of men like Mr. Koresh, and leave all to follow him. Quite a few (about 50) of his followers have followed him across the Atlantic from Britain and taken their children with them. It seems to be a remarkable quirk of the human psyche that people prefer error to truth. Preach the truth of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ to the populace, and nothing much happens. But publish abroad some monumental lie or some outlandish nonsense, and a great number would prick up their ears and want to know more. As Paul says, foolishness is seen by the world as wisdom, and vice versa. This is doubtless why there are so many strange but thriving cults in the world today; (hundreds in number); especially in the U.S.A. with no shortage of members no matter how bizarre the religious scenario. I recall, some years ago, seeing, on American T.V., the leader of yet another cult being interviewed, who described herself as being from outer space, and who called herself "Queen of the Flying Saucers". She was a crafty old dear, had a large following, was making a lot of money and managed to keep a straight face during the interview.

It might have been quite funny if it had not been so tragic. Indeed tragedy quite often stalks these cults and personal catastrophe often attends the members. Surely one of the worst examples of this was when around 1978, in Guyana, a certain Mr. Jones (?) persuaded 900 (yes, 900) of his followers to commit suicide, by drinking cyanide. Just how gullible can we be?

Giving The Bible a Bad Name

In spite of a lamentably weak understanding of the Bible, it seems that Mr. Koresh inflicted long diatribes on the Bible upon his followers, some 'sermons' lasting a whole day. Not all religious cults claim to espouse the Bible, of course, but those that do (such as this cult at Waco) merely succeed in giving the Bible a bad name. The public at large are inclined to blame the Bible itself for all the abuse it suffers at the hands of tortured characters like Mr. Koresh. People throughout the world will be watching the outworkings of this siege in Texas, and listening to the wild utterances of the sect leader, allegedly from scripture, and will end up saying, "Yes, that's what the Bible does to people: it drives them slightly crazy: let's keep clear of the Bible". And so Christianity in general, and the Bible in particular, are given a bad name, and brought into reproach. (One member of the Adventist Church in Britain said that Mr. Koresh's understanding of scripture was so puerile that he (Koresh) taught that when Zechariah (14:2) talks of houses being "rifled" it meant that they were shot at with rifles.)

The apostle Paul warned about how "the name of God was blasphemed amongst the heathen" through the unworthy actions of those with Bibles in their hands (Rom. 2:24). It is a sad fact that Christianity is brought into great disrepute by those claiming to uphold its principles, not only from cults like this recent one, but from a whole host of sources; ranging in variety from tearful 'confessions' from televangelists on T.V., to the Roman Catholic Church's involvement with the Mafia; and ranging in gravity from rich but elderly American ladies being induced (by fear and flattery) to place their life savings into the ready hands of some slick but charming young evangelist, to the local vicar running off with the choirmistress. Add to this the ongoing religious division; falling church attendances; Bishops casting doubt on the miracles and the resurrection; the sudden appearance increasingly of women in the pulpits; trendy and 'gay' clergymen etc. etc. and who can wonder that Christianity and the Bible are viewed with some cynicism and ridicule. Indeed this jaundiced perception of Christianity is evident even in plays and soap-operas on TV, when Christians are caricatured as interfering old busybodies, quoting pious platitudes but full of humbug, often "with a screw loose" and often with a slightly red nose, very mean, an effeminate voice, trousers at 'half-mast' and so 'wacky' as to be completely out of touch with the real world.

CONDITIONS WHICH FUEL THE CULTS

I suppose the very existence of cults is really a reflection upon the failure of the Church. One writer, very aptly, has said that "the cults are the unpaid bills of the church" and while this is very true I'm sure that most cult members are there not because Christ has failed them, but because they have never encountered Him; and that is where the Church has failed i.e. in bringing Christ to the people. All manner of circumstances and conditions have helped to swell the ranks of the cults, and indeed still do. **Disillusionment** with life is probably the dominant factor; and who can blame large numbers of young people in Britain today from the feeling of being left adrift? **Unemployment** on an unprecedented scale means that many youngsters leave school with nothing whatsoever to do. They wander aimlessly and hopelessly, watching endless hours of television, looking for some unusual distraction. If some new cult, outrageous and bizarre enough, catches their attention, they might just join; and would certainly find the existing churches much too tame and lifeless. Indeed, the young are not only disillusioned by cynical politicians but by hypocritical theologians and a sanctimonious

clergy. Add to this the **Drug Culture**; the awesome prediction and consequences of the global AIDS epidemic; the obvious collapse of the fabric of society, and many young people might be frightened into seeking some spiritual assurance, and be attracted to the cults. **Insecurity** would seem to be yet another factor; with many of the young sleeping rough and recovering from a serious breakdown in their family life, and sometimes virtually 'abandoned' by their divorced parents. It can hardly be surprising that young people see a world languishing in crime, sin, misery and chaos and don't consider it likely to find the answer in the establishment: and especially in the "established Church", which, in any case they probably blame for much of the spiritual confusion and uncertainty. Adolf Hitler gained his vast following in conditions like these but obviously our present social, moral and political climate is also ideal for lesser mortals, like David Koresh, to strut the world's stage for a few moments and promote his doctrine and cult. (The term "cult", by the way, comes from the Latin **Cultus**, meaning "worship.")

ONLY CHRIST CAN ANSWER TODAY'S ILLS

And so, for whatever the reasons, the cults flourish all over the world, even in competition with all the large world religions, not just Christianity. Although the cults provide very fertile soil for the high quota of 'drop-outs' in society, even the highly educated and sophisticated are taking a great interest in the occult and astrology. The days of "Flower Power" may have gone but disillusionment with life is still very much with us, and today, perhaps more than ever, we have new generations of the young still searching for their own particular panacea, and certainly not satisfied with flowers. It is encouraging, however, that some are getting hooked to religion rather than to drugs.

What ought we to do in these circumstances? In last month's article I referred to Paul's great discourse on the one, true and living God (Acts 17) a theme which Paul evidently considered the most effective for those to whom God was "The Unknown God". It seems obvious that God is as much unknown today as He was then, and we, like Paul, must publicise the fact that it is in God that we all "**live, and move, and have our being**": and that God "**is not far from any one of us.**" There seems to be a general perception that God, as the great cosmic clockmaker, having wound up His timepiece so long ago, has left it to unwind itself in due course. We must show that this is not so, and that God, in fact, takes a vital interest in each and every person that sees the light of day: and actively seeks every man's good. We are "the offspring" of God and it is God who sends seedtime and harvest, the sun and the rain, no matter how thoughtless and thankless we might be. The Church should also be extolling the fact that God has the answer to every problem of man: regardless of what that might be. God is not remote. He loves his creatures. We have talked of disillusionment but to the disillusioned God gives **certainty**, and to those who have a sense of futility God gives **purpose**. To those bewildered and in doubt God gives **confidence**. To those who feel ignored God gives personal **dignity and worth**. To the fearful God gives **courage**. To the forlorn God gives **hope** and to the lonely God gives **friendship and fellowship**. The "Family of God" (Eph. 3:15) is never too large to be added to, regardless of who we are, and God invites all men everywhere into His household (Eph. 2:19). God says, "**he that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out.**"

Life is cheap these days: murder is now quite commonplace and millions are allowed to die of hunger in a world with grain and butter 'mountains,' but to God each person is of incalculable value. The "gain of the whole world" is much less than the worth God places upon each soul. Through race or colour many are despised in this world, but God loves all men equally. Indeed **God so loved the world** (a sinful world at that) that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him need not perish but might have everlasting life. To those who have a fear of dying God gives courage; not a baseless hardihood, but a settled assurance that just as Christ

arose victorious over the grave, so likewise shall all those who obey Him. Thus we know that there is life after death, and that life is everlasting. The cults may speak to their devotees of reincarnation (i.e. coming back to the world in some other form) but only Christianity can proclaim the resurrection. Christ's resurrection to immortality proves that He is alive today and is seated at God's right hand, a fact that no other religion or cult can equal, or even hint at. Perhaps the greatest difference between Christianity and all other religions is that other religions have annual pilgrimages to the highly adorned burial chambers of their founders, whereas the tomb wherein Christ lay is very empty. "Christ arose and ever lives to save."

CONCLUSION

In face of the fact that cults (be they ever so weird like the one at Waco) seem to flourish while the true faith diminishes: what can we do: what ought we to do? We may have the feeling that we face an impossible task and that our small efforts are but a drop in the ocean. Inadequate as we may feel we are, I suppose, no more disadvantaged than Paul was when he, almost single-handedly, set about converting the entire Gentile world. He reckoned that he could do all things through Christ which strengthened him; and he also believed that if God was for him, nothing could be against him. Strange things can happen and I'm sure that we still marvel at the incredible demise of Communism. For the last 50 years or so, the threat of Communism has debilitated the world with fear: it was so powerful, ruthless and militant and by fervent evangelism, and intrigue, had gained a vice-like grip on more than half the globe: yet, almost miraculously, within a few months it had virtually disappeared. So, no power or force is invincible, and regardless of the odds we must, more than ever, proclaim the truth of God and preach Christ crucified. Eventually society will become so disgusted with itself that it will seek reformation. Indeed it was encouraging to see that, as a result of the recent public outcry at the horrific murder of a two-year-old boy by two ten-year-old boys, some politicians were clamouring for the re-introduction of old-fashioned Sunday Schools, that children might learn right from wrong (and, let's face it, they are unlikely to learn it anywhere else).

Error parades largely unopposed in the world, and truth lies buried within the covers of its book. It has been said that "since the time when the invention of printing gave the Bible to the common people, there has been no generation so religiously illiterate as our own" and of course much of the blame for that must rest with Christians. Years ago when all soaps were really of similar quality, one manufacturer sold much more than the others because, as he claimed, he publicised the virtues of his product more. There is no comparison between what the cults can offer, and the blessings to be found in Christ the Saviour, and we must emphasise that fact much more. The world needs a Saviour and does not know it: the world has a Saviour and does not know it. False religions and false Christs make it all the more imperative that we preach the true Christ and the real religion. If cults are the unpaid bills of the churches, let us begin to honour our debts.

EDITOR.

GLEANINGS

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

TELL IT OUT

"Tell it out among the heathen that the Lord is king!
Tell it out! Tell it out!
Tell it out among the nations, bid them shout and sing!
Tell it out! Tell it out!
Tell it out with adoration that He shall increase,

That the mighty King of Glory is the King of peace;
 Tell it out with jubilation, tho' the waves may roar,
 That He sitteth on the water-floods, our King for evermore!
 Refrain: Tell it out among the heathen that the Lord is King!
 Tell it out! Tell it out!
 Tell it out among the nations, bid them shout and sing!
 Tell it out! Tell it out!

F.R.H.

AN HIGHWAY FOR OUR GOD

“And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein.”

(Isaiah 35:8)

PAUL'S SOLEMN CHARGE TO TIMOTHY

“But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”

(2 Timothy 3:14-17)

AN HIGHWAY FOR OUR GOD

May I make a suggestion, that you read, and re-read the 35th chapter of Isaiah, and let your thoughts travel with this mighty man of God, as he brings before our minds the wonderful things which were to happen, through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Looking at the chapter as a whole it seems that we have before us a tray of precious stones, diamonds, emeralds, jasper, rubies, gems that sparkle and shine with all brilliance.

Well might the hymn writer say:
 Thy Word is like a deep, deep mine;
 And jewels rich and rare
 Are hidden in its mighty depths,
 For every searcher there.

The outlook for God's people had from time to time been dark and gloomy, they could see no light on the horizon, the sun was not shining, the birds had ceased to sing, and there was no music in the air. At times such as these wayward people needed the clarion call from heaven.

THEN IT CAME

Something dynamic was to happen. The advent of the Messiah was announced. Something was promised that would change things. The desolation caused by human sin was to change. A voice calls for **the preparation of an highway** in the wilderness.

“And an highway shall be there, and a way, and in it shall be called The Way of Holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it, but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein.”

The message is about “**The altogether lovely one, the fairest among ten thousand, the Rose of Sharon, the Lily of the Valleys, the Bright and Morning Star, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending.**”

AN HIGHWAY FOR OUR GOD

Selected by Leonard Morgan.

SOWING AND REAPING

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

And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together.

And herein is that saying true, One soweth, and another reapeth.

I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labour: other men laboured, and ye are entered into their labours.”

John 4:35-38

We talk more about evangelism and do less than anybody. It is an obsession that proceeds from our lips yet never enters our lives. Frustration results; guilt results; new methods result! But less evangelism. Therefore, we do not need a minor tuneup – we need a major overhaul. We need to evaluate our mentality – not merely our methods. Our incorrect mentality will only try more fads, gimmicks, gadgets that promise yet cannot produce. Both Christians and sinners are uptight over evangelism. We keep blundering with the same blunders! When will we ever learn? A return to scripture will help. Many of our methods lack biblical integrity. We must learn to do personal work from Jesus in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. He is the Master. Especially must we learn John 4 and John 9. Our methods must not violate his principles.

A Combine Mentality

We love to see combines in the field. We can almost “smell” the money! Crops must be harvested in season. But there is more to farming than combining. There is more to evangelism than baptising. This is the simple law of seed time and harvest! Read Gal. 6:7; Rom. 1:16, Luke 8:11; 1 Cor. 3:5-8; Eph. 4:11-16. Seed must be planted before harvesting can be expected! We have limited evangelism to reaping!

You would be silly to take a wheat combine to a field where no wheat had been planted! No seed – no harvest! You do not combine wheat where you planted cotton. Jesus said that reapers harvest the work of sowers! Both “sowers” and “reapers” are in evangelism! The farmer controls the sowing but not the harvest. The farmer determines what is planted where, then how much seed per acre. He has no control over the harvest.

The gospel is God’s power to save! The direct operation of the Holy Spirit is rejected. Fields white unto harvest indicate prior sowing. Fields cannot be white unless prior seed has been sown! No seed – no harvest. Fields are not “still white” unless they are “still sown.” One cannot say Africa, China are “white” unless seed is there! They may be receptive to the seed but the seed makes the harvest!

Seed Sowing Before Soul Winning

This is so simple, obvious. Sow the seed! The Jews hated to sow – they only wanted to reap. We are like that! There is no farm machinery that plants, cultivates, and harvests the same trip! **Learn This!** We cannot reap where we have not sown.

1. This explains our failures in gospel meetings and campaigns. Do we expect a harvest? Are you using the meeting to sow? If so, why demand results! The same is true on campaigns. We demand results! We go to sow and reap the same hour! A Church that cannot get prospects cannot keep converts! Why are you there? to sow? to reap? A Church that exhales disciples will inhale converts.

2. This means time and effort. It has been said that “A man has the right to hear the gospel once before others hear it twice.” But a coin has two sides. Few are converted the first time. We must go back and back. Even the family of Jesus did not believe until after the resurrection. The apostle Paul did not obey the first time. Our text has sowers then reapers. Paul planted and Apollos watered. Jesus first saw, then served, then spoke! Sinners can be reached but not pushed. Bread is expected when

the plough is sunk. But time and effort are between. In John 1 Jesus said, "come and see."

3. Sowing is painful and strenuous. "Sow in tears and reap in joy" (Psa. 126). Isaiah likens sowing with the pain of childbirth (Isa. 66:28). People artificially got, must be artificially kept. Nothing lasts that grows overnight. Some load the truck; some drive the truck; some unload the truck. They are all in the trucking business. There is no place for pride, criticism. Strong Churches evangelize (Eph. 4:11).

Lifestyle Evangelism

The whole gospel to the whole world by the whole person. The disciples could not even see "sowing" in John 4 and John 9. In John 4 they were more interested in their bologna sandwiches. Sowing comes from daily contacts not artificial confrontations. If you have no influence upon families and friends, why pick on strangers? Is it better for sinners not to know you? Has evangelism slipped into the sales department?

Read Mt. 28:18-20, "Going, as you go" . . . lifestyle. Evangelism is in our lives before our lips! We have sent out the wrong ones! Evangelism is far more than right answers to selected questions. It is far more than our telling others only what we want them to know. Evangelism is natural . . . yea automatic! We are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Evangelism begins in who we are not merely what we know! Evangelism flows from our lives not our memorised techniques. You don't take up Jesus like jogging.

It is buried seed that grows - not buried talents. Captain Cook was a famous English explorer. Everywhere he went he planted the seed of English flowers. These flowers exist today because he planted seed! **SOW - SOW - SOW!**

C. Hodge.



Conducted by
Alf Marsden

"Is it necessary to try to look beyond the Genesis record in order to fully understand the full implications of our salvation?"

This is a question which I have pondered over for a very long time, and which has been put to me in various forms. I am very aware of the fact that in attempting to answer it I am travelling through uncharted and, to some extent speculative territory, but I am utterly convinced that the post-Genesis teaching in the Old and New Testaments, particularly the teaching regarding the sinful nature of man, cannot be completely absorbed in the mind without the attempt. I know that there are many who say that what God has not revealed is not necessary for our salvation, and I take that point, but God **has revealed** some things whose origins are obscure, so do we take the obscurity as being of no importance, or do we try to clarify the obscure in order to relieve the doubts which may exist in many peoples' minds.?

Each person who has accepted Christ as Saviour, and has become part of His Body, the Church, should have the full assurance of faith, and doubts as to salvation should not exist. We live, however, in a world where cynicism and religious intolerance reign supreme; religious confusion over many centuries, and scientific and technological advancement have seen to that. We in the Church of Christ, quite rightly, refer our doctrine to the first century A.D. because it is Christocentric and Apostolic and

therefore authoritative; most people, though, can see no further, backwards or forwards, than the time in which they live, and it is these people that we have to convince that the Gospel is relevant to their lives, because it is they who invariably come up with the difficult questions, the answers to which may not be found in the literal word of revelation. So let's start with the difficult question of Creation.

The Godhead in Creation

The divine name 'God' is the Hebrew word ELOHIM. Hebrew scholars tell us that the 'im' ending in the Hebrew language indicates a plural ending, so Elohim can actually mean 'gods', therefore we have a plural name with a singular meaning. This seems to be borne out by Gen. 1:26 where the record states, "And God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness'." There is no discrepancy in v27 where the singular is emphasised, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them."

What we have to convince twentieth century man of is that God transcends even His Creation. Scientific thought has encouraged the philosophy of Pantheism (that God can only be identified through the universe). This reduces God to the materialistic world and, in fact, presupposes that the pursuit of the knowledge and identification of God can only come about by research into the physical universe. This is gross materialism which finds its true expression in evolutionary theories, which in themselves totally discount the divine and concentrate solely on the achievements of man. This is humanism, the theory which discards God and His Christ as divine and teaches that man can be the arbiter of his own destiny, and find his true fulfilment through a hierarchy of human needs which includes physical survival, security, social intercourse, and the arrival at the peak of self-actualisation: man has then 'made it' without God and Christ. That, brethren, is why we need to put on 'the whole armour of God' and wage the spiritual war from first principles. The Genesis record never sets out to prove the existence of God; it is taken for granted, along with His omnipotence and transcendental power. What twentieth century man cannot, or will not, understand is that God 'by a word' can call things into being which had no previous existence, as Paul says in the Roman letter, "He calleth those things which be not as though they were" (Rom. 4:17). Man has achieved great things by forming things out of other things which already exist; God, on the other hand can speak things into existence, without relying on things which had prior existence. That is the message which we have to get across. The Church has to destroy the message of evolutionary humanism with its attendant atheism. In order to do that, it may have to reach back further than Pentecost and the plan of salvation, essential though these are.

The Problem of Satan

During a discussion with a non-Christian, it was said to me, "A talking snake! You're not so gullible as to believe that, are you?" Comments such as that cannot be answered logically, or can they? The basis for this sort of remark is to be found in Gen. 3 in the discourses between the serpent and Eve; Adam, Eve, and God; and God and the serpent. This, seemingly, was the advent of sin into God's created world, and it was to vitally affect God's human creation. Paul commenting on this says, "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Rom. 5:12). But where did sin initially come from before it entered into man by the promptings of the serpent?

There are many who believe the so-called Gap Theory, and Gen. 1:28 seems to support that view, for we read, "And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth." In its simplest terms the theory says that between Gen. 1:1 and Gen. 1:2 there was a gap of some billions of years during which the earth suffered some cataclysmic event which is explained as a divine judgment

because of the rebellion of Satan against the will of God. Therefore, the earth was in darkness and covered in water: it had to be **reconstructed**. This theory is used to accommodate the 'geological age' system (which says that there were **millions of years** between each geological age); it is also used to support the 'evolutionary system' (the theory here being that in the waters that covered the earth there must have existed life in the form of protoplasm which was inherently amphibious and came onto dry land in due course); this interpretation is supported by the Day/Age theory, i.e., between each day of creation a vast period of time was involved. The first rule of interpretation, however, says that words should be given their ordinary grammatical meaning, so in the language of Genesis I would certainly contend for the fact that God completed His creation in **six literal days**, as we understand the word 'day' now. In any case, if we believe that God has the creative power ascribed to Him, then He could have finished His creation in **one day**, or even **one hour**, but the methodical and orderly way as described in Genesis emphasises the orderly way in which God has acted all down the ages. But this still does not tell us how he who is essentially evil (Satan) could emanate from Him who is essentially good (God), that is if God created **everything** as we believe.

My own interpretation of pre-Adamic events involves the acceptance of several propositions: (a) that which is essentially good **cannot** produce that which is essentially evil; (b) if God created **everything** then He must have created Satan (Lucifer, as he is sometimes called – but research that yourself); (c) if God created Satan, then according to (a) the creation must have been good (this also implies the pre-Adamic creation of an angelic host of whom Satan was one); (d) if Satan was thrown down from the presence of God then it must have been for rebellion against God, which rebellion God designated as sin; (e) if the proposition (d) is correct then we can assume with some confidence that any pre-damic creation of God had a so-called 'free will' either to obey or disobey; this would be consistent with the revealed immutability of the counsel of God. If there was a pre-Adamic angelic-host creation, it is not unreasonable to assume that they would have been given the same free will that God allowed in His **human** creation. It is a view that certainly appeals to me for the simple reason that God is love and He wants reciprocal love from His creation, and not the servile acquiescence of automatons. Some have advanced the idea that God created the human race so that He could demonstrate His love and mercy and His ultimate victory over Satan and sin. This is a monstrous view of a loving and caring God, because it would mean that all down the ages He was using man to further divine, selfish, ends; such a view is **not consistent** with the love, mercy, and justice of the God of Creation, and is used by those whose sole purpose is to defame God.

Brethren, this is the twentieth century, and during this century people have seen the devastation wrought on Christianity by denominationalism. We in the Church must stick to the authoritative doctrine of the first century, as taught by Christ and His Apostles. But the philosophical debates of Ancient Greece and Rome about life, God, and the soul of man, have been replaced by gross materialism and fleshly pleasures. The philosophers of today are overly concerned with science and technology and the promotion of ideas which would replace God, and give into the hands of men creative powers in the form of genetic engineering to produce things which many of us see as anti-God. My own belief is that we should attempt in whatever legitimate way we can to re-open the philosophical debate about the **true** God and thereby try to demonstrate to people what is happening in the world which has, in the main, given up thoughts of and obedience to Him.

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UZZA'S SALVATION

I read with interest the question which brother Alf tackled so admirably in the March 1993 issue and would like to offer a solution along totally different lines. These do not cross or undermine anything which Alf said but might be helpful to some.

When we face a very harsh judgement – in human eyes – such as was meted out on Uzza because he, a non-Levite, put his hand out to stop the Ark of the Covenant from falling off the cart, we tend to think that the punishment is also a statement about that person's eternal destiny. This is a very natural thing to do. We assume that Uzza will stand before God on Judgement Day condemned for what he did on that fateful occasion. In fact Uzza's death is only a comment on how seriously God intended His regulations to be obeyed and says nothing at all about whether He will forgive him for it. Let a couple of examples suffice to make the point clear.

In the days when we hanged people for murder, if I had murdered somebody and later genuinely repented and had the full assurance of the grace and forgiveness of God, I would still not be excused the gallows, I would indeed have to pay the price for my sin even though God would forgive me for it. The repentant thief on the cross was not excused dying, as he admitted justly, for his sins simply because he was forgiven by God. Moses and Aaron sinned and for their sin they were not allowed to enter the Promised Land, yet we all know where Moses is going to be eternally. The earthly punishment was just, and Moses had to pay it, but it did not affect God's grace or forgiveness in his case one iota. The punishment in this life made no comment at all on his eternal destiny. It would be ludicrous to think that all the Jews who died in the desert because they did not support Joshua and Caleb are going to be eternally lost. Many will be, of course, but it will not be just because of that one action.

If Uzza is condemned eternally, it will be for unfaithfulness in his whole life not because he made a thoughtless slip on one occasion. Our God is the same yesterday and today and He is a God of mercy and grace. His grace can equally cover the sin of Uzza just as it can cover my sins too. I would hate to think that I must live my life on a knife edge of worry hoping that at the moment of death I am not sinning in thought, deed or unwittingly and that that one unrepented act nullified all the promises of justification by faith in the all encompassing grace and mercy of God.

God knows perfectly well what was in Uzza's heart as he made his fatal error. In justice and righteousness He had to mete out the punishment He said He would if His wishes were not carried out, so Uzza had to die for what he did, and the punishment was just. We simply do not know at all whether Uzza will be unforgiven for what he did. What we do need to remember is the need to do as God said at all times and not to take anything lightly; to be vigilant and ensure also that we do not make the same mistake but to leave the judging to God, knowing that the God whose grace can forgive our sins could equally forgive Uzza's.

If we do not grasp the biblical teaching on grace, we will never live triumphant lives which bring glory to God, instead we will be cowed and stunted. We may well have an earthly price to pay for our sins but thank God we, as Christians, are not asked to pay the eternal price for them. Uzza paid the earthly price for his sin, and that is all we can say about it. Only God can judge on Uzza's life and decide whether he was another 'Moses' or another 'Korah'.

Graham A. Fisher (Aylesbury).

A child may be forgiven who is afraid of the dark. The tragedy of life is when men are afraid of the light.

THE DENOMINATIONS

12. — THE BRETHREN

I write now of the people who are commonly called 'Plymouth Brethren,' owing to the fact that in their earliest days Plymouth was a chief centre of their work. They began, however, in Dublin with the work of Anthony Groves, John Nelson Darby (a former Church of Ireland clergyman), and John Parnell (afterwards Lord Congleton), about 1830. They had a threefold bond, (1) the oneness of the Church of God, including all believers of every denomination, but excluding all not truly converted, (2) the completeness and authority of the Bible to regulate personal and Church life, (3) the speedy return of the Lord. The movement spread rapidly and Bristol and Plymouth became leading centres. But trouble soon arose, and in the early forties one party, led by Mr. Darby, split off and became the 'Exclusive Brethren,' the parent body being known as the 'Open Brethren.' It is this latter body which is the main body to-day. The 'Exclusive Brethren' have since split into many groups, some of them so exclusive that they fellowship only their own members of each local Assembly, as their 'meetings' are generally called. One section of the 'Exclusive Brethren' baptize believers 'and their seed'; that is they have no objection to infant Baptism so long as the infant is a child of members. All other groups practise only Believers' Baptism by immersion, but it is in no sense a saving ordinance. In the book, *Open Brethren*, it is significant that whilst Believers' Baptism is argued for, no *raison de'être* whatever is given for Baptism, and throughout it is assumed that it is not necessary for fellowship. What is necessary, is 'soundness in the faith and a Godly life,' and soundness in the faith is widely extended to include many things which most Churches regard as matters of theological opinion.

Belief and Practice

In a way 'The Brethren' represent the extreme limits of Protestant reaction to everything Catholic. They combine a high Calvinism with an extreme Lutheran piety, which latter prevents them from sharing in the political life of the community. Like the monks of old, they renounce the world and its pleasures, but unlike them they take no vows of poverty. Their unworldliness does not necessarily run in the same groove as that of other pietists. For instance, whilst they reject the theatre, games, etc., many of them do not take the same attitude to the drink question. They hold firmly to the doctrine of election and its corollary 'once in grace always in grace.' I think it is true to say that all are millenarians, and throughout their history they have constantly predicted various 'second comings' of our Lord. Like the Quakers, they recognise no Ministry in the Church and like them their worship meetings are under the control of the Holy Spirit. Unlike them, however, they are not given to the practice of 'silence' and they observe the 'breaking of the bread' every Sunday. It is however, a service much more like a 'love feast' than a celebration of the Lord's Supper. They are keen on Mission work and often their Missionaries work on the 'faith principle,' receiving no actual salary. They also join in such undenominational Missions as the China Inland Mission and the North Africa Mission.

Famous Men

They have produced a number of hymn writers to whom all the Churches are indebted, such as R.C. Chapman, Sir Edward Denny, and J.G. Deck, as well as Darby himself. Thomas Kelly, though not united with 'The Brethren,' had a similar outlook. Amongst scholars the most famous was Tregelles, whose work on the Greek text of the New Testament prepared the way for the work of the Revisers. The father of

Edmund Gosse was a learned scientist and a Fellow of the Royal Society. But perhaps by far the most famous of their number was George Muller, who founded the world-famed orphanage in Bristol as a testimony to the power of believing prayer.

Other Characteristics

'Open Brethren' are strictly congregational in Church government; 'Exclusive Brethren' less so. The former are also much more ready to co-operate with other Christian bodies, though they generally look with disfavour on any who take a 'high' view of Baptism, including Catholics of all types and Churches of Christ, among whom in the early years they exercised some influence, especially with regard to the question of Ministry, through Thomas Hughes Milner, who was originally in membership with them. It was this influence that David King referred to as 'the Plymouthian leaven.' 'Brethren' make much more of Bible exposition with a fondness for interpretation by 'types'. Their evangelistic zeal is commendable to all. Unlike Quakers, women are excluded from ministry in the Assemblies, but vigorous separate women's work goes on amongst the 'Open Brethren.'

W. Robinson.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

May 2	Psalm 78: 1-8	Matt 13:24-43
May 9	Prov.3: 11-26	Matt. 13:44-58
May 16	2 Kings 4:38-44	Matt. 14: 1-21
May 23	Joshua 3	Matt. 14: 22-36
May 30	Isaiah 29: 9-24	Matt. 15: 1-20

THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

The study of the Kingdom of Heaven is one of the most important studies any student of the Bible can undertake. In Matthew chapter 13 alone, there are seven parables given by Jesus to describe various aspects of the Kingdom. It was obviously an important subject to the Master.

What is a kingdom? For a kingdom to exist there must be the following: a constitution, a king, subjects, laws and territory. No one has written better on this subject than Alexander Campbell. "We must trace the constitution of the Kingdom into eternity – before time began. We must date it from everlasting and resolve it into the absolute gracious will of the eternal God . . . The Lord Jesus Christ is the constitutional monarch of the Kingdom Heaven . . . The subjects of the Kingdom are all born

again . . . The supreme law of this kingdom is love – love to the King and love to each other. From this law all religious homage and morality flow . . . The whole earth is the present territory of the Kingdom of Heaven, but the new heavens and earth are to be its inheritance."

When did the Kingdom of God come? Because Jesus spoke of it during His ministry some think it had to come by then. But it must be remembered that the Kingdom was promised and preached by John, by Jesus, the Twelve and the Seventy before it commenced in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). This, of course, was after Jesus' ascension and coronation in heaven. The apostles Paul and John later confirmed that it had come (Colossians 1:13; Revelations 1:9).

Parables

Jesus' parables on the Kingdom are most interesting and revealing. Of course, the one on the Tares of the Field was later explained to the disciples. "The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; the enemy that sowed them is the devil; the

harvest is the end of the world: and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth His angels and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend and those who do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (13: 38-43).

Some have interpreted this parable as an objection to church discipline. As one writer has commented: “It is argued that inasmuch as He forbade the disciples to root up the tares, lest the wheat also be destroyed, that we ought not to attempt to eliminate the sinners from the fellowship of the church, but let them grow together until the Lord comes and makes final separation.” Observe, however, that Jesus said: “The field is the world” (13:38). The parable has nothing to do with righteous and wicked men growing up together in the church, but on earth!

We read: “Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls; who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it” (13: 45-46). It should be noted that in the ancient world pearls had a very special place in men’s hearts. They were desired not only for their monetary value, but also for their beauty. But, the Kingdom is likened to the merchant, not the pearl. Edwin Rice, in his commentary, wrote (in 1909): “Such travelling jewellers, ‘merchants’, are still common in the East. They search for pearls and jewels of particular purity and of the highest value, so that their wealth may be easily carried and easily concealed”. Oh, that all men and women everywhere would seek the Kingdom with equal diligence!

Death of John the Baptist

At a recent Mutual Benefit Meeting

of the Slamannan District Churches of Christ, we discussed the difficult question – Why does God allow evil in the world? To answer this perfectly, then we would have to possess the mind of God Himself. We will never really know the answer this side of heaven. All of us who love God and serve Him have to face up to the fact that He allowed His righteous servant, John the Baptist, to be beheaded in prison. (Of course, He also allowed His beloved Son to suffer and die on a cross at Calvary.) A premature death has been the lot of many of God’s people.

The Bible is clear – evil exists in the world and has its origin in a personality, Satan. It was he who led the rebellion in heaven and who was eventually cast out into the earth with his angels (Revelation 12: 7-9). The evil one from heaven has produced all the evil on the earth His works are seen everywhere; but his days are numbered and his end is certain (Matthew 25:41; Revelation 20:10). Jesus has made sure of this (1 John 3:8).

The Apostle Peter

Jesus walked on the water – a miracle indeed. It produced fear in the apostles (14:26). We read: “And Peter answered Him and said, Lord, if it be you, bid me come unto you on the water. And He said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water to go to Jesus” (14: 28-29). But something happened to him – he became afraid because the wind was boisterous. So he began to sink, crying out that the Lord might save him. “And immediately Jesus stretched forth His hand and caught him and said unto him, O you of little faith, wherefore did you doubt? And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased” (14:31-32).

There is a well known song that reads:

“Put your hand in the hand of the man who stilled the water;
Put your hand in the hand of the

man who calmed the sea;
Take a look at yourself and look
at others differently;
Put your hand in the hand of the
man from Galilee.

God's Commandments and Men's Traditions

Jesus described the scribes and Pharisees as hypocrites because they exalted their traditions above the commandments of God. Also they honoured God with their lips, but their heart was really far from Him (15: 7-8). Jesus said: "But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (15:9).

To the scribe and Pharisees, the external of their religion were what mattered. To Jesus, the human heart was of the utmost importance (15:18-20). It was Burns who once wrote:

"The heart aye's the part aye
That makes us right or wrang."

Undoubtedly, Burns wrote these words in the light of the Scriptures, which he knew quite well. Solomon, for example, had wisely taught: "Keep your heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (Proverbs 4:23). And again: "A sound heart is the life of the flesh ..." (Proverbs 14:30). Jesus, therefore, was simply teaching truth that had been heard many centuries before. It is tragedy that many of His generation had reached the stage of resisting it.

Ian S. Davidson,
Motherwell.

ALL THINGS BRIGHT AND BEAUTIFUL

*"A good man considereth the life of his
beast, but the tender mercies of the
wicked are cruel! (Pr. 12:10).*

The way of the Bee is wise, for he hearkeneth to the Lord. Thou Lord showeth the Bee to dance, that by his

dance he may instruct his brethren through the whirring of his wings. They watch him closely, then follow his movements while leading them far off to the east or to the west where are the flowers, for in them is their very food. Once filled, they return with their sweet burden to their Queen in her nest, and thus the whole tribe is nourished, and so prospers.

God's knowledge is in the heart of the Bee. How wondrous are His ways.

The Eagle is a fierce bird and greatly to be feared. She sails aloft through high mountains searching out her prey below, for her eye is keen. In her talons she grips her prize, and returns to the eyrie. There, her chicks, in their infant beauty, greet her with open mouths. Fierce though her countenance, the eagle is the most gentle of parents. She tears the food according to the size of her offspring, and tenders it with a soft motion, bending low her head. The chicks are her delight, and all her ways to them are soft.

God's knowledge is in the heart of the eagle, and for us also He careth. Render thanks unto God for His providence to us and to all creatures.

The Termites are little esteemed by man, yet they conduct themselves like skilled architects. They dwell in vast colonies in the lone places of the desert. They construct high palaces taller than a man thrice over; and all their works are wondrous to behold. Within their tall columns they form many tunnels, row upon row, but unlike a man, they are not lost within the maze, but carry on their daily tasks as if on a straight path. They hasten with food to their Matriarch who lies upon her throne, pulsating to disgorge her eggs for future generations.

In an everlasting parade among their myriad chambers, they purify each cell, so that all is clean and seemly, hour by hour.

Though the desert sun rages with a burning heat without, the inward high-ways of their palace fortress are ever cool, for the Great Father has endowed the termites with such knowledge to work these marvels for His own mysterious purpose.

Is not God worthy of all praise and His Holy Name to be magnified?

Sister I.D. Severson, Canada.

ANOTHER OPEN LETTER TO THE CHURCHES

Dear Brethren,

I am offering to the Churches in Great Britain, 100 copies post free, of my message, **THE LOVE OF CHRIST**, for distribution in your area.

Besides the words "Surpassing Knowledge" on the front page will be (DV) the words:

This message is given with the compliments of Leonard Morgan, "Briar-croft", 396 Atherton Road, Hindley Green, Wigan WN2 4QD.

An Elder of the Church of Christ, meeting in Argyle Street, Hindley, Wigan.

Also any brother or sister who lives away from the assembly, and is willing to give out these messages in your village or town, the same applies:

100 messages Post Free.

Are you interested in sending out the Gospel to the lost?

If so, write to Leonard Morgan at the address above.

(P.S. The church meeting in Argyle Street, Hindley, Wigan, has ordered another 2000 copies.)

COMING EVENTS

Kirkcaldy: Annual Social is scheduled for 17th April, 1993. God willing.

Speaker: M. Gaunt

NEWS FROM THE CHURCHES

Slamannan District: The Quarterly Mutual Benefit Meeting was held at Haddington Meeting-house on Saturday, 6th March, 1993, when the subject discussed was "Why does God allow Evil to Exist". Brother James R., Gardiner was the chairman and the speakers were James Moncrieff, Haddington, and Graeme Pearson from Dunfermline. As anticipated, the subject was a difficult one; as evil is not only difficult to define but difficult to trace to its source: and sometimes good emerges from evil i.e. The destruction of the Egyptians in the Red Sea was evil to them but life-saving to the Israelites. Lots of interesting thoughts emerged from a lively discussion after the speakers had spoken, and altogether a very pleasant time was spent in fellowship. God willing, the next meeting will be held on 29th May, at 4 p.m. in the Motherwell Meeting place, when the subject will be "Should we only forgive those who repent?" The speakers will be D. Chalmers, Ayr, and John Colgan, Tranent. The chairman will be Ian Davidson.

Harry McGinn, (Secretary)

FIT FOR THE MASTER'S USE

How many sincere children of God have wanted to be of greater service to the Lord, but have been frustrated and discouraged, because they felt they had nothing to offer? They leave the fellowship of the Church and become bitter complainers. There are a couple of passages, if understood by many such people, would help them remain happy and faithful Christians.

"But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour. If a man therefore purge himself from

these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the Master's use, and prepared unto every good work." 2 Tim. 2:20-21.

We Are Not All Vessels of Gold

"*In a great house,*" the Lord's house, the Church, there are people with various abilities and talents. There are none of us that can do everything well. We all have our "long suits" and yet greatly limited in many other areas. This passage teaches us this very lesson. We cannot all be vessels of gold and silver. Some of us have to be vessels of wood and earth. Vessels of wood and earth can be used in some ways that vessels of gold and silver cannot be used. Vessels of wood and earth are not necessarily vessels of dishonour. The gold and silver vessels can be vessels of dishonour as well as wood and earth. It is easy to become frustrated if we cannot do all that others more talented than we can do. We must realize what we can do and cannot do. When we learn to accept what we can do and who we are, we will be a lot happier.

What Makes a Vessel of Honour or Dishonour

The inspired writer goes on to say: "*If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour.*" You want to be a gold or wood vessel of honour? Then purge yourself. The word "purge" means "to clean out" one's self. When we get ourselves right

with God, when we truly are people of a "pure heart," then we are a vessel of honour, whether of gold and silver or wood and earth. When the opportunity to do service unto the Lord presents itself, we can do it within the bounds of our abilities.

What Can Purging Do for Us?

Besides making us vessels of honour, there are other benefits as a result of purging ourselves. We will be "sanctified" or "set aside" unto the Lord. We will show by our obedience whose servant we are. Mark this down: you are a servant; you have no choice in this. The only choice we have is: whose servant are we going to be? ". . . whether of sin unto death or of obedience unto righteousness" (Rom. 6:16)? After being around us for a short time, no one should have to ask us if we are Christians. We are saints and must act as such. We owe allegiance to no one else or anything. God is our all in all through Christ. We know to whom we have committed the keeping of our souls.

Then one who purges himself will become meet (suitable) for the master's use. The Lord will not use just any and everybody, only those who have purged themselves. Whether we are vessels of gold, silver, wood or earth, he will use us unto his honour and glory.

K. Marshall.

THE SCRIPTURE STANDARD is published monthly.

PRICE PER YEAR — POST PAID BY SURFACE MAIL

UNITED KINGDOM and COMMONWEALTH £ 7.00
CANADA & U.S.A. \$13.00

AIR MAIL please add £2.00 or \$3.00 to above surface mail rates

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DISTRIBUTION AGENT & TREASURER:

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Telephone: Longniddry (0875) 53212 to whom change of address should be sent.

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Scotland EH37 5PT. Telephone: Ford 320 527

"The Scripture Standard" is printed for the publishers by
Lothian Printers, 109 High Street, Dunbar, East Lothian. EH42 1ES. Tel: (0368) 63785