

The SCRIPTURE STANDARD

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

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CONTENDING EARNESTLY

WE seem to be living, these days, in an age of bland acquiescence to all the religious ills which surround us. Perhaps we have gradually been conditioned into the point of view which regards anyone who raises his voice in criticism of any religious belief or practice as a trouble-maker. Sometimes emotive terms are used in connection with those who voice their disapproval and they are tagged with such terms as "Hobbyist" and "crank" and if the stigma of these expressions do not shut them up then they can be branded as disrupters and withdrawn from. Small wonder then that many brethren gag themselves quite voluntarily and sit in their places quietly. Others have come to the conclusion that it is not 'Christian' to raise our voices in protest in some religious matter and if we do so it goes only to show that we have not matured sufficiently to get along with our brethren. They equate strong disagreement with lack of love. The reasoning is that as we must love our brethren we must not disagree. I know a man who would not dress as his son dresses, and who would not go to places his son frequents, and who vehemently disagrees with his son's generations' philosophy in life but who still loves his 'hippy' son.

It was refreshing therefore, to me at least, the other day to hear voices raised in protest on ecclesiastic matters. The occasion was the opening of the annual General Assembly of the Church of Scotland and the place was St. Giles Cathedral in Edinburgh's historic 'Royal Mile'. I often think that if only those paving stones in the 'Royal Mile' could talk what tales they could tell, considering that all the famous characters of Scottish history have strode upon them and the drama of nearly all this nation's stormy history have been enacted in their close environs. The windows of the office where I am employed look down into the courtyard of St. Giles and consequently all the staff have a grandstand view of all the pomp and circumstance attached to such public occasions. At this year's ceremony there was a military band and a pipe band, adding noise and colour to the scene, and a hundred soldiers or so making up the guard of honour (with fixed bayonets). The Lord High Commissioner to the General Assembly, Sir Hector McLennan, inspected the troops and then joined the illustrious gathering of worshippers already in St. Giles for the initial service. On filing silently out from the service these same worshippers encountered the hostile stentorian shouts of Pastor Glass, and his supporters of 20th Century Reformation movement, and had to walk the guantlet of such embarrassing taunts as 'Traitors' : 'God save Scotland from popery' : 'No popery' and 'The blood of the

martyrs is on your hands'. Most of the Church of Scotland dignitaries and clergymen hung their heads and tried to ignore the shouts and one or two tried a smile and a defiant wave. I don't hold any brief for Pastor Glass and am not proposing to discuss the rights or wrongs of his activities but at least he was there, and some of his supporters had come all the way from Ireland, to protest. They were protesting, of course, at the fact that, for the first time in 415 years a Roman Catholic Archbishop was addressing protestants as 'brothers' and had for the first time since the Reformation been invited to address the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. The Free Church of Scotland described the transaction as 'another nail in the coffin of protestantism', and they are probably right. Pastor Glass was barred from attending the address by the R.C. Archbishop in spite of a vow of silence and later commented, "I consider this a very sad day for the National Church of Scotland that an Archbishop of the Roman Catholic Church, which is considered by your constitution and confession as an Archbishop of the Anti-Christ, is allowed the democratic right to speak in this Assembly, yet one who holds the doctrines of John Knox is refused admission". All this has done almost in the shadow of the large statue of the legendary John Knox. The Archbishop, when he had concluded his address, was loudly applauded by the hundreds of clergymen who packed into the huge Assembly Hall.

As a casual spectator of these, and other similar events, one sometimes is left wondering what John Knox would think of all this were he to come back today and see the present state of the churches and the doctrines he had fostered. What would some of the martyrs think of it all — those who died, sometimes cruel deaths, rather than submit to religious error and tyranny. Where would God find men today with fire, courage and resolution enough to be martyrs. Perhaps the present generation would not think that anything could matter so much or was worth dying for. Men died, at one time, for God's truth — or at least for the truth as they understood it. Men today don't appear to think that we should ever take God's word as seriously as all that. In fact some would say, as I suggested at the outset, that it is not 'very Christian' to argue about the word of God, and would make themselves scarce were a serious disagreement to break out. How very fortunate for us that the martyrs and early reformers didn't share that view. One of the men in the office who had witnessed the scene remarked upon how disgusted he was with the unseemly behaviour of Pastor Glass and could not understand what all the fuss was about — "after all, if we are all supposed to be Christians how can we act like that".

Having wondered what John Knox would think of things today if he could come back leads us on to wondering what the apostle Paul would think of the churches today if he could come back. Would he think that we were too soft and pampered and had too easy an existence, that our meeting houses were too comfortable and that all the full-time evangelists (with their seven-roomed manses) had never had it so good? Would he raise a few words of protest at what he would find? Would he consider that some of us had gone digressive? Would he consider it 'un-Christian' to decry that which he found to be wanting or in error?

The Reformation martyrs certainly did not subscribe to the modern maxim "If you can't beat them, join them". In contrast we read in John 12:42 "Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue". I feel sure that many of us stay quiet when we should in fact be speaking up — and we stay silent lest we be put out of our 'synagogue' (or club; or clique; or faction, or whatever).

On the 16th July, 1637, in the very same St. Giles Cathedral, mentioned at the beginning, there was a tumult, brinking upon a riot, at the introduction of the Anglican Common Prayer Book and one, Jenny Geddes, won immortal fame by throwing her stool at the pulpit. Whether we today would consider her protest ladylike, let alone 'Christianlike', yet the facts are that most schoolboys can tell one all about it. I'm sure she little believed that her action would be remembered three hundred years later.

As the situation demands, let us try and "earnestly contend" (contend is an aggressive word) "for the faith which was once delivered to the saints". Jude 3. EDITOR

IT IS MY PSALM — IS IT YOURS ?

Not for ever in green pastures
Do we ask our way to be;
But by steep and rugged pathways
Would we strive to climb to Thee.

Not for ever by still waters
Would we idly quiet stay;
But would win the living fountains
From the rocks along the way.

Perfect Protection — “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil” Psalm 23:4

LET us say at once, our text does not say it is a dark valley. There can be no shadow without light. If you go into a cellar with no light, you certainly will see no shadow. It may help us also to remember it is a valley, not a cul-de-sac, just as surely there is a way into the valley so surely there is a way out. Now take note of the word “THROUGH” you are not to stay in the valley, the Psalmist with a ring of confidence declares:— “Yea, though I walk THROUGH the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil”. We can with safety follow our shepherd, having the assurance that He knows the way, “The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord: and he delighteth in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the Lord upholdeth him with His hand”. Psalm 37: 23,24. We have mentioned before that there are twenty six personal pronouns in our Psalm, so we have an intimate relationship with the shepherd. Let us talk first about Him:— “The Lord is my shepherd”...“He maketh me to lie down in green pastures”...“He leadeth me beside the still waters”...“He restoreth my soul”...“He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake”. For a moment or so, let us leave talking about the shepherd, let us talk to Him. “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me”. We ought not to be afraid of the valley, He leads, and we have Divine protection, surely it makes all the difference when you have somebody with you.

Let us take an example from David who wrote this Psalm, he was confident that if he had to go through the valley of the shadow of death, he would not be afraid. The Lord had taken care of him before, and He would do so again. Shall we take courage from the words of David to Saul, when he said: “The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine” 1 Samuel 17:37. Perfect Protection...from the lion...from the bear...from the Philistine. Why then should we fear walking through the valley, we are following the same Lord? So on with the Shepherd, through the valley, being led to a place of light, life, and love, on to the sunlit heights.

Down in the valley or upon the mountain steep,
Close beside my Saviour would my soul ever keep;
He will lead me safely, in the path that He has trod,
Up to where they gather on the hill of God.

“They go up by the mountains, they go down by the valleys unto the place which thou hast founded for them” Psalm 104:8. I suppose many of us would prefer going up by the mountains, without going down into the valleys. The apostle Peter enjoyed the fellowship and companionship of the Lord Jesus. On the mount of transfiguration, he said unto Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias” Matthew 17:4. It was necessary for them to go up — and it was necessary for them to go down. Of course, it would be nice to stay in the “green pastures”, and by “the still waters”, and not face the journey “through the valley of the shadow of death”. No doubt, we prefer sunshine to shadows, the mountain rather than Gethsemane, or to the “place called Calvary”. “Follow Me”, may mean, and often does, bring us “mountain-top experiences”, “happy fellowship”, those experiences and fellowship was shared by a large number of brethren, during the wonderful times at the Hindley Bible School. Brethren leaving the cares and problems of life for a short time, to eat from the hidden manna, and drink from the fountain of life, sharing the “pastures of tender grass”, and sitting by the “waters of

quietness". "Follow Me, may mean, and aften does, bring us to "the valley of the shadow of death". It is well for us to remember our Lord Jesus never offered or promised an easy religion, in fact the opposite is the case. His terms of discipleship are hard and severe. "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sister, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" Luke 14:26. "And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple" Luke 14:27. "So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple" Luke 14:33. Surely these words remind us He claims our full allegiance, our first love, our loyalty. His call, is a call to Self-service, Self-denial, Self-sacrifice. God only knows how we fail Him from time to time, I think I should qualify that statement, for surely "Mr Innam", reminds us of our shortcomings and failures.

It will also help us to realize that our characters are not moulded by mountain top experiences alone, they will, and do help. Peter, James and John saw the beauty, and glory of the Lord, and were inspired. "His raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them" Mark 9:3. "They saw no man any more, save Jesus only with themselves" Mark 9:8. We also, must keep our eyes on Him, as we make our journey through the valley. O child of God, we are heirs of a vast inheritance, and many times we have failed to draw from our estate, those things helpful for the road. In that estate are "the unsearchable riches of Christ" Ephesians 3:8. Paul writes about "the riches of His grace" Ephesians 1:7, "the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints" Ephesians 1:18. Those riches and more, my brother and sister, are at our disposal, let us put those riches in our knapsack to help us on our journey as we walk the pilgrim way, and take an inventory of the resources our own Psalm gives us.

PERFECT SALVATION	"The Lord is my shepherd".
PERFECT SECURITY	"I shall not want".
PERFECT REST	"He maketh me to lie down in green pastures".
PERFECT REFRESHMENT	"He leadeth me beside the still waters".
PERFECT RESTORATION	"He restoreth my soul".
PERFECT GUIDANCE	"He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his names' sake".
PERFECT PROTECTION	"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil".

"Enough; this covers all my wants,
And so I rest:
For what I cannot, He can see,
And in His care I saved shall be,
For ever blest".

Fortified with the knowledge that the Lord is our shepherd, and that He is leading us, we can face the journey THROUGH the valley, knowing that our Lord is near.

"The very dimness of my sight
Makes me secure;
For, groping in my misty way,
I feel His hand; I hear Him say
'My help is sure'."

It is a fact that most of God's children sometime or other are forced to face the valley with all its problems and dangers, and at times many find it a long valley, with hard and stoney paths, and thorns and thistles hindering progress. It is true to say that "the valley of the shadow of death", has been responsible in making MEN and WOMEN, one could nearly say that some of them have 'camped' in the valley, and not because they wanted the experience. Looking at the countenances of some of those who have spent years in the valley, one can see a beauty, a strength, a gentle dignity, and we could truly say of that brother, or sister, PERFECTED THROUGH SUFFERING. They have drawn from those hidden resources which sustained them through difficult days and nights, through the times of walking "the winepress alone", helping

them through their Gethsemane and Calvary to Olivet. The man who made the fountain flow, has been the source of their strength, the glow of the riches of His love and grace, could be seen in the triumphant look on their faces. It may be of course, they endured, like Moses, as "seeing him who is invisible" Hebrews 11:27, Seeing things unseen, can be a great inspiration, which brings an inflowing and outflowing of love, in the lives of the devoted followers of the Lord Jesus. We cannot see the finished pattern of our lives, but the Master planner can, and He knows that the valley is vital in our journey homeward.

"Not till the loom is silent, and the shuttles cease to fly,
Will God unroll the pattern and explain the reason why,
The dark threads are as needful in the Weavers skilful hand
As the thread of gold and silver for the pattern He has planned".

May I suggest you read Psalm 84, you will find someone who passing through the valley of Weeping (Hebrew; Baca) they make it a place of springs. Let me draw your attention to a few verses (RV).

"Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee;
In whose heart are the high ways to Zion.
Passing through the valley of Weeping they make it a place of springs;
Yea, the early rain covereth it with blessings.
They go from strength to strength,
Every one of them appeareth before God in Zion. Verses 5, 6, 7.

O Lord of hosts, Blessed is the man that trusteth in thee". Verse 12

I pray that the time spent in "the valley of the shadow of death", you too, may find it to be "a place of springs". May the Lord's richest blessing be your portion.

This month's exercise:- Learn by heart Psalm 23:4 and Psalm 84: verses 5, 6, 7, 12.

LEONARD MORGAN.

WHEN SHOULD A CHRISTIAN ARGUE ?

SOME people always try to wriggle out of a religious argument, while others get into every religious argument they can find. Both are extremists in their own way. The right thing to do is to get into some religious arguments, and keep out of others. One must refute those who contradict sound doctrine (Tit. 1:9), but one must also avoid foolish controversies and unprofitable disputes (Tit. 3:9).

The problem is how to tell a real issue from a worthless controversy. There are two ways to test any religious argument, to determine whether you should get into it or keep out of it. As we look back into the past, there is one thing that happened that overshadows all other historical occurrences, and as we look into the future, there is one thing that is going to happen that outshines all other future events. These two great happenings are the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, and His second coming. These are the two things that determine whether a religious argument is worthwhile or unprofitable.

Firstly, Paul stated, with reference to his doctrine among the Corinthians, "I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him Crucified" (1 Cor. 2:1-2). In other words, if a religious issue did not relate to the cross of Christ, Paul was not interested in it. If it did relate to the cross, Paul was determined to speak out on it.

Secondly, the letter to the Hebrews, on the subject of argument among Christians, says, "Pursue after peace with all men, and after the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness

springing up cause trouble" (Heb. 12:14-15). This means that if what you believe on a certain issue makes no difference to your judgement on the last day, then that issue is not to be pursued. If you will see the Lord, if you will attain the grace of God, regardless of what side you take in a religious argument, then that argument is not worth your attention.

So next time you come across a religious controversy, ask these two questions: (1) What has this matter got to do with the cross of Christ? (2) Do I have to take a stand on this matter in order to be saved on the last day? Then, according to your answer, get into the argument, or keep out of it.

To boil this down to its essence, Christians should approach every religious question in this manner: If, in this argument, you question my salvation, or I question yours, then we will thrash this thing out. Otherwise, we will leave it alone.

Written for S.S. by RON GRAHAM, Australia.

ASSURANCE

EVERY Christian desires the assurance of salvation and should know security and certainty as well as the assurance which accompanies our confession and love for our Saviour. "Blessed Assurance" should not only be the theme of the hymn but the experience of our individual lives.

God anticipated this desire and gave many references to it in His word, as a basis for our faith.

There is a difference between the Christian and the unbeliever – it could not be otherwise. To the Christian comes freedom from fear of death, union with Christ and fellowship with the Church, peace of mind, power to witness for Christ and confidence in Him, love for the Word of God, belief in the power of prayer and the gift of the Holy Spirit. How often we forget and fall short but there is forgiveness – WE CAN RECEIVE THE BLESSINGS.

The fourth Gospel brings to us the offer of salvation in terms of LIFE or ETERNAL LIFE. In this Gospel and in his epistles John sets forth the necessity, nature and offer of eternal life as taught by Jesus – towards the end we read its purpose and object.

John chapter 20, verses 30-31 reveals Jesus as the Christ and the fact that belief in Him means LIFE. Full knowledge and certainty can be found by reading and studying 'THE BOOK', accepting the Saviour it reveals, obeying all His requirements and then resting on the Divine promises for life – away with doubts, fears and despair.

The plan of Salvation and the assurance of Eternal Life, as taught by Jesus, is found in one chapter of John's record. In John chapter 3, verse 5 Jesus teaches the necessity of a second birth. 'Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God'. Verses 14-15, 'And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life'. Verse 16 is the Gospel in miniature – the most quoted text; 'For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life'. Verse 22 tells of baptism, by Jesus in the land of Judea. Verses 34-36, God's love for His Son is expressed "in the giving of all things into his hand", making Him the Saviour – the giver of eternal life to those who believe and obey. There is enough in the third chapter of St. John to convince the reader of the need, offer, conditions, and the joy and assurance which accompanies the ACCEPTANCE of SALVATION.

Blessed ASSURANCE! Jesus is mine!

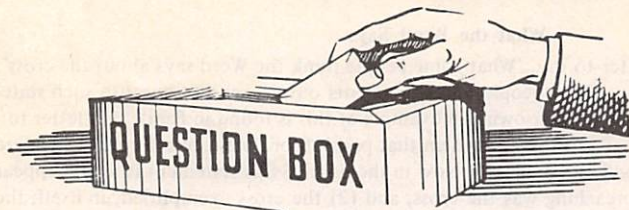
Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine!

Heir of salvation, purchase of God,

Born of His spirit, washed in His blood.

Amen.

F.R.W. KIMBERLEY.



Conducted by
Alf Marsden

“Twice I have heard preachers say that Romans chapter 6 means being baptized into the cross. Can you comment on this? (The preachers, incidentally, were not of the Church of Christ).”

ONE of the most amazing things which has happened in so-called christendom is the way in which some people still refuse to acknowledge the sonship and deity of Jesus. They treat him off-handedly and in this case they are willing to afford more importance to the cross than they are to the one who died on it. Perhaps an inanimate thing makes less demands upon them than a living Christ; it is probably easier to worship an idol than it is to worship the true God. Be that as it may, it is true to say that the cross has achieved a unique position in the minds of men. Some of our best-known and well loved hymns seem to foster the idea; ‘The old rugged cross; In the cross of Christ I glory; Jesus keep me near the Cross;’ etc. The radiance streaming from the cross has tended to outshine the ‘bright and morning star’.

Why should this be? Before we can answer that question it might be as well to explore,

- a) What the cross is,
- b) What the Word says in relationship to it,
- c) The significance of the One who died on it.

What is the Cross?

The Greek word for cross is STAUROS and denotes primarily, an upright pale or stake. On such, malefactors were nailed for crucifixion according to Roman Law. It was on such a cross that Jesus died. There was nothing special about it in the sense of its importance or intrinsic value.

As regards appearance, it should be distinguished from the ecclesiastical form of the two-beamed cross. Peter indicates the appearance when he refers to the cross as a tree (XULON), this being the upright stake. “The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree” (Acts 5:30). According to W.E. Vine the two-beamed cross had its origin in ancient Chaldea, and was used as the symbol of the ancient idol Tammuz, the ‘T’ shape being the first letter of the idol’s name. It would appear that after about the 3rd century A.D., apostasy had become so rife that pagans were allowed into the churches apart from regeneration by faith, and were permitted largely to retain their pagan signs and symbols. Hence the Tau or ‘T’, in its most frequent form, with the cross-piece lowered, was adopted to stand for the cross of Christ. Incidentally, you can read about how women in Ezekiel’s day prostituted themselves to the Phoenician idol Tammuz; it stands amongst some of the most diabolical abominations shown to Ezekiel by God as being perpetrated by the nation and elders of Israel. Small wonder that God warns against idols when people’s imaginations of the cross that Jesus died on have their origins in ancient idolatry. So much for being baptized into the cross. Would you want to be baptized into something, even if it were possible, which originally was representative of idolatry in one of its worst forms?

What the Word Says.

Perhaps it would be better to say, 'What some people think the Word says about the cross'. The trouble arises, of course, when people take statements out of context and use such statements to substantiate theories of their own. An example of this is found in Paul's first letter to Corinth, "For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God" (1 Cor. 1:18). Now in the light of this statement it would appear that (1) the object of the preaching was the cross, and (2) the cross exemplified, in itself, the power of God. In actual fact, of course, after Paul had discoursed on the foolishness of preaching, he went on to say, "But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness" (1 Cor. 1:23). So when Paul speaks about 'the preaching of the cross' he means to indicate that he is preaching of the Holy One who hung on it. Without Christ on it the stake was only a Roman instrument of torture and death.

Again, some who want to make the cross itself seem important, point to Eph. 2:16 and say, 'But God put the cross as the means of reconciliation between Jew and Gentile. In form, it is symbolic of the open-armed unity that christendom aims at'. Nothing of the kind. Earlier in the same letter Paul asserts, "But now in Christ Jesus ye who were sometimes far off (Gentiles) are made nigh by the blood of Christ" (Eph. 2:13). In his second letter to Corinth Paul says, that, "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself" (2 Cor. 5:19).

You see, in all of this, the cross was only the vehicle for the enactment of God's will. A major religious group have fallen into the same mistake by the near-deification of the Virgin Mary, but, as with the cross, Mary was only a chosen vessel for the enactment of God's will. Even the Church of the Lord is looked upon by some as sacrosanct, and they fail to give place to the Head from whom the whole body is fitly joined together.

Actually, there need be no confusion. The cross and Christ are inseparable. As a matter of fact, the cross on which Jesus died is called 'His cross'. Paul when writing to Ephesus said, "For it pleased the Father that in him (Jesus) should all fulness dwell; and having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him (Jesus) to reconcile all things unto himself (God)" (Col. 1:19-20). I think we can say truthfully that hundreds of people must have been crucified. There was no significance in their crosses simply because there was no significance attaching to the people who died on them. But when the Son of God hung there, he gave a special significance, even to a Roman stake.

The Significance of Christ

The death of Christ on the cross is said to be the atonement for our sin. The O.T. idea of atonement was 'to cover', and so the animal sacrifices acted as a covering until the time should come when Christ would put away sin for ever by the sacrifice of himself. I have always thought that the christian should never look upon his sins as being merely covered by the sacrifice of Christ. The purpose of the cross was to do away with the cause of God's enmity, namely, by taking away our sin (Read Col. 1:19f.f., also 2 Cor. 5:18,19).

When Paul wrote his letter to Rome he said that in the death of Christ, "God had set him forth to be the propitiation through faith in his blood" (Rom. 3:25). Christ, in the giving of his life, appeased the just and holy requirements of God. He was the perfect sacrifice; he had to be because only the perfect sacrifice could serve to abolish sin. Herein we see the love of God expressed in the cross of Christ. God doesn't reconcile us and then love us; He reconciled us by the sacrifice of Christ because He loved us. Our salvation is a gift from God and we must receive it as such. It is not meritorious at all.

Do we fully grasp the significance of the cross of Christ when we sing, 'Redemption, Oh Wonderful Story?' Christ is our ransom. He paid it all. As Peter puts it, "Ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold...but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Pet. 1:18,19). How often do we, foolish creatures, neglect the incorruptible and cling to that which is corruptible? How can anyone attach more meaning to the instrument of sacrifice rather than to the precious sacrifice Himself? It is sacrilegious bigotry.

On the cross, Christ was substituted for us. Was there ever a more effective substitute? Paul said, "For he (God) hath made him (Jesus) to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (2 Cor. 5:21). Peter says, "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree" (1 Pet. 2:24). Do we need to say more? What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear!

What about Romans chapter 6?

If anyone says that this passage of scripture teaches that we are baptized into the cross then he must mean that we are baptized into Christ. We cannot separate Christ and his cross. Furthermore, all the blessings of God are in Christ. What does the passage say? Just listen to Paul, "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection" (Rom. 6:3-5).

No, preachers, whoever you are, we are not baptized into the cross, if you are trying to separate the cross from Christ. We are baptized into Christ. Is there really anyone or anything else that we could be baptized into? We are saved in Christ. We are justified in Christ. We are sanctified in Christ. We shall stand before God in Christ. Then, please God, we shall spend eternity with Christ. Even with all of its hallowed associations, I will cling to the living Christ rather than to the dying wood.

(All questions please, to Brother Alf Marsden, 66 Mitchell Street, Newtown, Wigan, Lancs)

SCRIPTURE READINGS

AUGUST 1975

3—Nehemiah 1	1 Thess. 3
10—Psalm 1	1 Thess. 4
17—Proverbs 6:1-15	1 Thess. 5
24—Isaiah 33	2 Thess. 1
31—Isaiah 14:12-23	2 Thess. 2

"MORE AND MORE"

THE Thessalonian Christians had begun their changed lives in really difficult circumstances. Those Jews who accepted the truth about Jesus, did so against a background of strong opposition. Just as the hardened hearts of the

religious authorities in Jerusalem refused to accept the claims of Jesus in spite of the evidence of His holiness and peerless teaching, and miraculous powers, so the majority of the Jewish community in Thessalonica remained hostile and unconvinced. New truth when it demands a vital change in ideas and habits, is hard to receive. The almost fanatical faith in Moses and reverence for the Temple would close the minds of many Jews against the gospel. For some of their own race to come among them and announce salvation for Gentiles was intolerable. Likewise the Gentile believers began a life excited the the animosity of their neighbours through the exhibition of holiness and purity. Moral degradation was a feature of heathen life. The marriage tie hardly existed. Men were ruled by lust, but the new life demanded chastity.

Heathens lived for their own selfish ends only. Honesty was rare. Life was cheap. The gospel appeal is lovely indeed when the gentle voice of Jesus says to the weary in soul, "Come unto Me!" Doubtless comfort and joy filled the hearts of converted Gentiles especially. However it is also a call for self-denial and self-control such as produced immediately a contrast between the old life and the new. The Christians in that community quickly became "marked men". Opposition and hatred developed. The decision to be Christ's was not made lightly. It was costly. Paul had no illusions about this. He understood that Satan would get busy with his flock, and had already warned them so that their troubles in a sense only confirmed their steadfastness. Nevertheless he longed to help and by sending Timothy from Athens took practical steps to do so. His longing to see them was not fulfilled for a long time, and can be assumed to have taken place on his third journey (see Acts 20:1&3) when two Thessalonians joined him (verse 4) one of whom accompanied him on his journey to Rome (Acts 27:2). Thus did his work at Thessalonica bear fruit for his comfort in due time. The joy Paul experienced through the good news of this congregation made him still more anxious that there should be spiritual growth manifested there. However good the work it must develop. They were doing well but could not stay there. It was necessary that they should continue. They must "abound more and more" (4:1). Their complete sanctification was in view. They were showing love to one another and to a wider circle but they must "abound more and more" (4:10).

Life's Plain Duties

Christ is for every day, and temptations come every day in a society like Thessalonica (and surely everywhere), and so into every day come the apostolic instructions. We see so many practical aspects in these chapters. First there is the special need for care in sex relations (4:3-8). Each man must exercise self-control, and in relation with his wife must be completely faithful. He must never look elsewhere, never rival a brother in such matters. We perhaps need to say today that the divine arrangement for marriage is life-long. Any sex relation outside marriage is sin. To the Gentiles of his day this did mean a new outlook. Paul also discourages worldly ambition in the words "Study to be quiet" (4:11) which

Phillips translates "Make it your ambition to have no ambition" because the word "study" conveys that idea. At the same time Paul is encouraging particular attention to "your own business", which assures success through industry and honesty. We are reminded of Peter's words, "a meddler in other men's matters" (1 Peter 4:15) indicating care with one's own business, which means doing well whatever we put our hands to (Col. 3:23). The Christian has to watch his step so that if fault is found it is not his. Notice "falsely" (Matt. 5:11). The other matters for personal individual daily attention are given us in a few verses from 5:12 onwards—be respectful, peaceful, sympathetic, never return evil for evil and exercise the other virtues so well stated in the A.V. We expect that spiritual gifts were present in the church through the apostles' appointment and they would be treated with special respect, but for today there is the need to encourage, not quench enthusiasm, and to encourage study of the Word of God.

The Coming of The Lord

It has always been a part of the good tidings of salvation that Jesus is coming again, this time with irresistible power. That it should loom large in times of severe trial is natural, but it should never be neglected. The fact that so many years have passed since the gospel was first preached has quieted the expectation. With the Thessalonians under persecution it was indeed a lively hope. Having given up idolatry they worshipped the true God and waited for the return of His Son (1:10). Their final triumph will be then (2:19). They have too in the first letter the manner of His return (4:10-18). They know that the time of His coming is unpredictable (5:2). All Christians die with the expectation of this final event, but in their enthusiasm in the new faith some Thessalonians evidently failed to realise that death did not affect the future glory. Some had become discouraged about those who had died as though they would miss what the living would experience — the tremendous joy of seeing the Lord come. Paul corrects such an impression in the first letter by giving them (and us) the truth about the return. The second letter was written quite soon after the first and also from Corinth. He stayed in that town eighteen months (Acts 18:11). Apparently some had misunderstood or misinterpreted references to the coming as indicating an im-

mediate event. The faith and love so emphasised in the first letter had indeed abounded earning the commendation, and gratitude to God on the part of the apostle, and assures them of the certainty of God's approval, and their reward. He gives also the assurance that their suffering patiently at the hands of the wicked is not overlooked. God is just and sin will be punished. Those who afflict the saints will bear their punishment and it will be final and irrevocable when the Lord Jesus comes. How terrible is the picture of doom!

Apostasy

In combatting the idea of an immediate return of the Lord, Paul refers to something he had already taught (2:5). We can only surmise what "that which restraineth"—A.V. "withholdeth"—can be. Interpretations are too numerous to consider in detail. We feel with many commentators that the apostasy is the Roman Catholic Church with the succession of claimants to the Vatican Throne making claims too near to Paul's description to be mistaken, see also 1 Tim. 4:1-5. Time has clouded over the crimes committed in the name of Christ by that organisation, and we have to remember that a counterfeit has to be like the true to be useful to the maker of it. It is a humbling thought that efforts at reformation have almost always "fallen away" (apostasy) from the ideals which motivated them.

R.B. SCOTT.

PATIENCE

If we Knew the baby fingers,
 Pressed against the window pane,
 Would be cold and stiff tomorrow—
 Never trouble us again—
 Would the bright eyes of our darling
 Catch the frown upon our brow?
 Would the prints of rosy fingers
 Vex us then as they do now?

Ah, those little ice-cold fingers,
 How they point our memories back
 To the hasty words and actions
 Strewn along our backward track!
 How those little hands remind us,
 As in snowy grace they lie,
 Not to scatter thorns — but roses
 For our reaping by-and-by!
 Selected.

JESUS KNOWS AND CARES

IN 1955 a woman who worked beside me told me of her 24 year old daughter, a believer like myself, who was very ill and had been hospitalised for about two years. Her doctor had said that it was important that efforts be made to keep the daughter's spirits up. I composed a few lines and sent them to her. Later I was delighted to receive a letter of thanks and was very pleased to hear that my verses had proved a great help, especially the last verse. I humbly submit these few lines with the fond hope that they may be helpful to others who may be laid aside on sick beds.

Maybe sometimes we wonder why
 we suffer so much pain
 when we have tried to serve our Lord
 Without one thought of gain.

Yet those who give no thought to Him
 find all things fine and gay
 Always enjoy the best of health
 Nor think of Judgement Day.

But Jesus knows what suffering is
 And so He understands
 How much you would do if you could
 And for you He has planned.

When you have learned the lesson sure
 He wants to you to teach
 He has some other aching heart
 Which only you can reach.

So trust in Him, He prays for you
 And His prayers God will hear
 There's nought can separate from Him
 Those to whom He is dear.
 Eric M. BLUNDELL (Hereford).

HE who cannot forgive others breaks the
 bridge over which he must pass himself.

COMING EVENTS

Blackburn, Mill Hill, New Wellington Street.
 SPECIAL MISSION
 October 25th — November 2nd 1975
 Brother L. Daniels (Bristol) the speaker.
 Further details to follow.

ARTICLES WANTED

Articles requested from readers, but the editor has sufficient items of poetry for the present. Thank you for your help and co-operations brethren. When writing articles please write clearly, on one side of the page only and leaving a space between each written line. If you have something to say to your brethren why not put pen to paper. If you consider that there is a pressing need in the churches why not present your impressions in a short article. If you have a favourite text, or subject, why not translate it into a short article if you think it would be helpful to the brethren. Make your articles a reasonable length, but it doesn't matter if they are on the short side – the main thing is to write them and pop them in the post.

EDITOR.

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