

# The SCRIPTURE STANDARD

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

Vol. 67 No. 9

SEPTEMBER, 2000

## ONCE CONCEALED - NOW REVEALED

"Behold I show you a mystery," says the apostle Paul, and obviously assumes that all his readers will immediately be interested in the very mention of a **mystery**. Men in all generations, and in all parts of the globe, have been, and still are, intrigued by that which is truly mysterious. A speaker gets undivided attention if he proposes to discuss a mystery: particularly if he also claims to provide the solution. Agatha Christie, and many similar writers, have for years, galvanised the attention of millions of readers, and made a fortune in the process - all based on an insatiable appetite on the part of the human animal for things curious, bizarre and mysterious. Men and monarchs have, in all ages, travelled the world: spending much time and vast fortunes in the pursuit of explanations to bewildering circumstances. Men have risked their very lives to decipher strange inscriptions; find 'lost' worlds (like Atlantis); raise sunken vessels; trace the source of rivers (like the Nile); find lost tribes (like the 10 'lost' Tribes of the O.T.); solve riddles and prophecies (like those of Nostradamus); investigate puzzling phenomena like the Bermuda Triangle, the Mary Celeste, the demise of the dinosaurs; seek elusive creatures like Yeti (Abominable Snowman), 'Bigfoot' or Loch Ness Monster, et., etc.

As children we were all enthralled by the conjurer at the party, and, as adults, we are still amazed by illusionists who can even make an aircraft 'disappear.' Some puzzles are as enigmatic as ever and we can all have our opinions of the Turin Shroud, Stonehenge or U.F.O.'s and the 'corn-field circles.' And who can possibly explain the mystery of spontaneous combustion in humans? How can human bodies suddenly catch fire and slowly be consumed with a searing and incinerating heat, which very often does not singe their clothing, or scorch adjacent furniture? Yes, there are all manner of baffling circumstances in this amazing world and we have only had space to hint at some of them. I suppose we all have our own personal list of mysteries which confound us most, and doubtless we add to it all the time. Agur had just such a list and this he shares with us (in Proverbs Chapter 30: well worth a read) and says "**There be three things which are too wonderful for me, yea, four which I know not. The way of an eagle in the air; the way of a serpent upon a rock, the way of a ship in the midst of the sea; and the way of a man with a maid.**" One wonders how mystified Agur would have been if he lived in these days of submarines, X-rays, television, electricity, the combustion engine, and men walking about on the moon, etc.

### ONCE CONCEALED: NOW REVEALED

Few would deny, I suppose, that the Bible is the one Book which deals in true mysteries. Although this might come as no surprise (for the Bible is after all, God's revealed mind to man) yet the Bible **enlightens** rather than mystifies, and provides the

solution to much that would otherwise be entirely mysterious. God is, after all, **the revealer of secrets**, and indeed if it were not for the Bible we would know very little of **how, where, when and why** life began, or of the history of early man, the Jews and other nations. There are, obviously, many mysteries still in the Bible but these are, in the main now of historical and academic value only, as far as the O.T. is concerned. 'Mysteries' in the N.T. however are worth a glance. In passing, it is, perhaps worth mentioning that 'Religious Mysticism' as pursued by the Greeks and Romans, is still around today and many modern cults shroud their beliefs and practices in religious Mumbo-Jumbo, in striking contrast to the Gospel of Christ so openly proclaimed by the apostles with **certainty, clarity and simplicity.**

**WILLIAM BARCLAY**, says "Mystery" in the N.T. "has a special meaning. In Matt. 13:11 (and Mark 4:11) the disciples are congratulated by Jesus that to them has been given to know the 'mysteries' or 'mystery' of the Kingdom of Heaven. Both the R.S.V. and N.E.B. substitute 'secret.' In religious Greek a *musterion* (a mystery) is not something which, as in the English word, is complicated and mysterious, it is something which is obscure and unintelligible to the outsider, but crystal clear to the initiate to whom the inner-meaning of it has been revealed. An example of this is the action of the Lord's Supper. To the outsider the sight of people taking a sip of wine and a piece of bread is obscure and, it may, even be slightly ridiculous. To the member of the Church who understands the inner meaning of it, it is the most precious action of Church worship. It will, therefore, often happen that to translate *musterion* by 'mystery' or even by 'secret' will be misleading in English and the translation has to be 'filled out.' Thus we may translate Jesus's words, **'You have received the privilege of knowing the meaning of the Kingdom of God, a secret which only a disciple can understand'.**"

### MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM

And so, according to W. Barclay, "mystery" in Hellenistic Greek meant 'a secret', or 'something puzzling', but in N.T. Greek it meant something previously concealed which is now revealed: and revealed to those who present themselves, as pupils, initiates, or disciples to receive the information. Clearly, men must be of a receptive disposition to benefit from God's revelations. The word 'mystery' or 'mysteries' occurs some **30 times** in the N.T. and, subject to obvious exceptions, usually refers to matters now revealed whereas previously concealed. For instance, when Jesus was asked why He taught in parables, **"He answered and said unto them. Because it is given to you to know THE MYSTERIES of the kingdom of God, but to them it is not given."** (Matt. 13:11). These 'mysteries of the kingdom' were not mysteries in the sense that they were incomprehensible (in fact they were simple and easily understood) but were mysteries in that they had not previously been made known. They were also being withheld initially from those who would not appreciate them, and restricted to those willing to receive them, for Jesus went on to say, **"Therefore speak I to them (the Jews) in parables, because they seeing see not: and hearing they hear not: neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand, and, seeing ye shall see and shall not perceive: For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed: lest at any time they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear. For verily I say unto you many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them."** (Matt. 13:13-17).

Nothing much has changed and even today the 'mysteries' of the Kingdom are lost

on a world which is largely indifferent to God, with eyes and ears closed, with heart hardened to the gospel and grimly determined not to be converted to Christ. We also learn from this passage that these things were entirely mystifying to the prophets and good men of the O.T. who would dearly have loved to have seen and heard the things which are now revealed to us in Christ Jesus. Surely this emphasises the great honour and privilege bestowed upon us in these 'last days': something not to be regarded lightly.

### STEWARDS OF THE MYSTERIES

Some things will ever remain mysteries, of course, because God has not revealed them, and we can never discover them. Paul suggested this when he proclaimed, "**O' the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God: how unsearchable are His judgements, and His ways past finding out. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, or who hath been his counsellor?**" (Rom. 11:33-35). Even if God was to reveal many of His secrets we would probably be unable to comprehend them. How can the finite human mind cope with the infinite? And so as the Jews discovered a very long time ago, "**The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong to us, and to our children for ever.**" (Deut. 29:29).

Paul described himself (and the other apostles) as "**ministers of Christ, and STEWARDS OF THE MYSTERIES of God.**" (1 Cor. 4:1) and added, "**but we speak the wisdom of God IN A MYSTERY, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: which none of the princes of the world knew: for had they known it they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory**" (1 Cor. 2:6-8). The incarnation of Jesus and His gospel were ordained even before the world began but concealed until these last days: God's wisdom hidden in mystery. One of the most prominent N.T. mysteries must surely be God's '**ingathering of the Gentiles**' and His inversely proportional disenchantment with Israel: reversing the previous fortunes of both. Indeed Paul was '**a light to the Gentiles**' and could say, "**For this cause I, Paul the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles. If ye have heard of the dispensation of the Grace of God, which is given to me to you-ward. How that by revelation He made known unto me THE MYSTERY (as I wrote afore in a few words), whereby when ye read ye may understand my knowledge in THE MYSTERY of Christ, which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. THAT the Gentiles should be fellow heirs and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel.**" (Eph. 3:1-6). The last sentence of that quotation aptly describes 'the Mystery of Christ.' What Israel lost, of course, they can more than gain through the gospel: a better covenant based on better promises. Paul went a little farther and extended the mystery to include Israel's '**blindness**: explaining it thus: for I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of **THIS MYSTERY** lest ye should be wise in your own conceits: **THAT blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.**" (Rom. 11:25). And Paul expands the mystery still farther by including not only Gentiles and Jews, but also the '**angelic world**' when he says, "**Having made known unto us THE MYSTERY of His will, according to His good pleasure, which He hath purposed in Himself. THAT in the fulness of times He might gather IN ONE, all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth, even in Him.**" (Eph. 1:9). And so in summing up, Paul could say, "**the MYSTERY which had been hid from ages and from generations, but is now made manifest to the saints. To whom God would make what is the riches of THIS MYSTERY among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, The Hope of Glory.**" (Col. 1:26). Thus the Essence of the mystery: "**Christ in you: The Hope of Glory.**"

### THE GREAT MYSTERIES

The N.T. also talks, however, of other mysteries. For instance, Paul warns of the Mystery of Iniquity and says **"For the MYSTERY OF INIQUITY doth already work: only he who letteth will let until he be taken out of the way"** (2 Thess. 2:7). And what was this mystery of iniquity which was already at work when Paul penned these words? Paul adds, **"Except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition: Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped: so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God showing himself that he is God."** (v.3). History describes how the 'falling away' did occur and how 'that man of sin' did emerge and did claim to be God on earth; and still does. Only one man fits that description. As well as the Mystery of Iniquity, Paul also talks of the Mystery of Godliness: as a Great Mystery, and says, **"And without controversy great is THE MYSTERY OF GODLINESS, God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory."** (1Tim. 3:16). Paul says, **"Without controversy"** (there is no argument: it is a mystery): yet men try to explain it. This is certainly a mystery which will ever remain fairly incomprehensible: i.e. God manifest in the flesh. And so THE MYSTERY OF INIQUITY amounted to man trying to become God: whereas THE MYSTERY OF GODLINESS refers to God when He became a man.

Space is fast dwindling but perhaps one other GREAT MYSTERY could be mentioned: a mystery which seemed to have originated with the union of Adam and Eve, and the two becoming one flesh (see Eph. 5:31). Paul refers to this and says, **"For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is A GREAT MYSTERY: but I speak concerning Christ and the Church."** Thus the First Adam (and Eve) prefigured the binding relationship between the Second Adam and the Church.

### NEW MYSTERIES

Unfortunately, in a short article, it has been possible to mention only a few of the thirty, or so, references to N.T. Mysteries, and obviously there are many new mysteries which exercise men's minds with regard to the life to come. What will heaven really be like; will we recognise loved ones; how will our 'time' be spent; and some even wonder if their beloved pet 'Rover' will be there. The N.T. gives only tantalising glimpses of heaven and Paul's visit to the Third Heaven and to Paradise, gave only a description unlawful for him to utter. Occasionally we hear the oft misquoted words of Isaiah (64:4) that **"Since the beginning of the world, eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him"** as if this referred to the next life, but Paul quotes these words correctly and adds, **"But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit"** (1 Cor. 2:9). Isaiah's words were fulfilled 2,000 years ago. Nevertheless we know that the cynic is greatly mistaken in thinking that those who reach heaven will spend eternity twanging on harps, and we also know that heaven will be blissfully pleasant and celestially happy, for **"God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes: and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away"** (Rev. 21:4).

**"Behold I show you a mystery . . . we shall all be changed"** (1 Cor. 15).

EDITOR.

### IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS

That anyone could after reading Romans chapter 4 deny the fact of imputed righteousness seems incredible. Certainly there may be disagreements as to the

implications of the term, but to deny its reality hardly seems possible. Yet one continues to see articles and hear sermons that do indeed deny that righteousness can be imputed. For example one writer commenting on 1 John 3:7 says, "Of a certain type of character it is affirmed that he is righteous. Who is he? He that doeth righteousness. No other is." He further says, ". . . but God approves of those only who do right (keep His commandments); therefore, to possess the approval of God and the righteousness which He requires one must do right by keeping His commandments." This quotation is not to provoke dispute with its writer but simply to demonstrate the reality of the position. It is not a straw man that is being addressed.

Paul's statements from Romans 4 which are pertinent to this discussion are: 1. "Abraham believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness" (vs. 3) 2. "His faith is counted for righteousness" (vs. 5) 3. "Even as David also described the blessedness of the man, unto who God imputeth righteousness without works" (vs. 6) 4. "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin" (vs. 8) 5. ". . . faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness" (vs. 9) 6. ". . . that righteousness might be imputed unto them also" (vs. 11) 7. "And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness" (vs. 22) 8. "Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him; but for us also to whom it be imputed, if we believe on Him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead" (vvs. 23-24).

Undeniably these verses declare that righteousness has been or may be "imputed," "counted unto," or "counted for." The question, of course is, what does this mean? The Greek word is *logizomai*. It is used 41 times in the New Testament with 34 of these being by Paul. Repeatedly the translators have rendered the word "imputed" or "counted." Wuest says it is an accounting term used in secular Greek in regard to the crediting to one's account a deposit that was made. This is clearly the way it is used at Gal. 3:6 when Paul says, "Even as Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness." Other representative uses of the term outside Romans 4 are Phil. 3:13; 2 Tim 4:16 and Heb. 11:9.

Perhaps, however the real problem does not lie with an understanding of *logizomai* (impute), but with the meaning of *dikaiosis* (righteousness). The quoting of Psa. 119:172, ". . . for all Thy commandments are righteousness," followed by the assumption that nothing else is righteousness would indicate this to be true.

### RIGHTEOUSNESS

In the Old Testament the Hebrew words *tsedeq* and *tsedaqah* are regularly translated "righteousness." The word in Psa. 119:172 is *tsedeq*. Originally these words signified that which conforms to the norm. For the Hebrews, of course, this norm was the character and will of God. That these words referred to the ethical conduct is undeniable. The normal usage of the word "righteous" in the Old Testament had reference to the man who "did right."

"Righteousness" in the New Testament is regularly from *dikaiosis*. The corresponding verb (*dikaioo*), is with two exceptions (Rom. 6:7; Rev. 22:11), translated "justify." Does this word always mean "righteousness" in the ethical sense, or does it sometimes have a wider meaning that includes salvation by "justification?" Can it refer to one who is "righteous" because he has been justified (pronounced "not guilty" by God), or does it refer only to the one who "does right?" That is the heart of the question and the key to what is meant by "imputed righteousness."

When Paul writes of the law of righteousness (Rom. 9:31), he is referring to the ethical demands of the Mosaic Law, but when he uses the same expression in Rom. 3:21 he is making reference to "salvation" accomplished by God through Christ. In Rom. 6:16 sin that brings death is contrasted with obedience that brings righteousness. In the remainder of chapter 6 the meaning of "righteousness" is the standard of

Christian ethics or conduct that is the result of having been set free of serving sin.

It is then seen that in the Roman letter alone Paul uses the word "righteousness" in *three different ways*. **First**, it is used in the sense of ethical conduct demanded by the Law of Moses; **secondly**, of the salvation which is the gift of God through Christ; and **finally**, of the ethical conduct which is demanded of the Christian.

Care should be taken to keep in mind the relationship between "righteousness" and "justification." Both are used to translate the same word. Moses E. Lard has a good discussion of the alternative usage of these words in translating *dikaiosune* in his Commentary on Romans. A failure to recognise the fact of the connection between "righteousness" and "justification" and the failure to recognise that "righteousness" is used in different ways in the New Testament leads to misunderstanding where none should exist. All the commandments of God are righteousness, but that is not all that is righteousness.

### RIGHTEOUS BY IMPUTATION

Should it be true that only righteousness available to man is that righteousness which comes from doing right, there would have been no point in Christ coming into the world. The Law of Moses was holy and the commandment holy, just and good (Rom. 7:12). If man could have kept the law, he could have been righteous. However, Paul said that even though the law was spiritual, he was carnal and sold under sin (Rom. 7:14). The inability of man to be righteous under law was the fault not of the law, but the weakness of the flesh (Rom. 8:3).

Man is no more righteous under Christ than under the law if it be true that he is righteous only to the extent he does right. Man could not then keep every detail of the law all the time. Neither can he do that in the Christian age.

Therefore, if man is to be righteous (justified) he must be pronounced "not guilty" because his sins are forgiven. It is in this way that man is made righteous by Christ. The good works or positive righteousness of Christ are not transferred to man. One does not become more ethical by having righteousness imputed. One does become "justified" or comes to occupy a right relationship with God, thus can he be said to be righteous because by faith (that includes an obedient will) the righteousness of Christ is imputed to him. Remember that imputed simply means "counted." God does not impute or count sin against the one who is walking in the light with Christ (1 John 1:7), thus he is righteous by imputation, not because he faultlessly keeps the law.

G. COOK.

### PREACHING "OUT OF SEASON"

All who endeavour to win souls are distressed by the religious disinterest of our generation. The majority seem to be concerned only with the world and temporal things. They want to eat, drink and play while giving no thought to judgement and eternity.

This condition is not new. It existed, for example, in ancient Corinth where Paul went preaching. He describes the situation: "*For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness*" (1 Cor 1:22-23).

What did Paul do in Corinth? His approach is surely an example for us.

#### NO OTHER INCENTIVES

Paul did not offer other incentives. He might have done so. He had miraculous gifts which announced a great "healing service" or a "Holy Ghost Revival" where signs they were seeking would be performed. Paul was also quite well educated in the wisdom which the Gentiles so highly valued. He could have announced a lecture on "The Judeo-Christian Ethic" or on "The Philosophical Assumption of Moses" and some

would have come to hear. Paul might well have defended such an approach on the ground that, once he had them there he could teach them a little about Jesus or, at least enrol them in a correspondence course.

Is this not the justification for many activities in which churches are involved these days? We have seen printed announcements from the Lord's people offering recreation, entertainment, coffee and doughnuts, magic shows, secular music performances and various other treats for those who would attend some gathering. When we ask for scriptural authority for the Church's involvement in such things, the answer usually is: We can make contact in this way and teach them about Jesus.

Paul recalled his work in Corinth in these words: "*For I determined to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ and Him crucified*" (1 Cor. 2:2). The Church of our Lord must be recognised for its proclamation of Christ crucified, not for its social programmes. Recreation, secular education and entertainment are no part of its assigned work. Involvement in such things not only violates its charter, but also detracts from its sacred and holy mission.

### NO HUMAN ADOREMENT

Paul did not attempt to "dress up" the gospel with his own personality to make it more palatable to secular minded people. Some who will reject the approach already described, yet believe the gospel can be glamourised by human presentation. They want the most eloquent speakers possible - men with dynamic personalities - men with "charisma." They like to have those to do the preaching whose educational achievements or whose achievements in business or even on the stage will attract even the worldly minded. We once saw a full page advertisement of a campaign featuring a large picture of the speaker and listing in bold type his credentials: "Educator, Lecturer, Author, TV personality, World Traveller and Promoter." We have also heard the suggestion that the gospel can best be preached by a large and well-trained choir.

In contrast Paul wrote: "*And when I come to you, brethren I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God . . . And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men but in the power of God*" (1 Cor. 2:1,3-5).

Out there amongst the masses there are still a few who are interested in the simple undisguised "preaching of the cross." These are the only ones who can be saved anyway. Others may be briefly drawn by our devices; they may even be brought into the Church as "wood, hay and stubble" (1 Cor. 3:12), but they will not be saved as long as they disdain the cross. Instead of taxing our ingenuity and exhausting our finances in trying to attract the secular minded, we need to use our resources and opportunities to preach the simple gospel to the largest number of people in the simplest manner possible. In this way we can hope to preach "*to all who are called both Jews an Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God*" (1 Cor. 1:24).

S. HALL.

### FIT FOR THE MASTERS' 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 realise 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

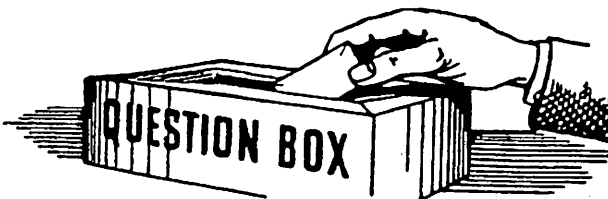
The inspired writer goes on to say: "*If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour.*" You want to be a gold or wood vessel of honour? Then purge yourself. The word "purge" means "to clean out" one's self. When we get ourselves right with God, when we truly are people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




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Conducted by  
Frank Worgan

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*"Would you please explain the incident recorded in Matt. 21:18-22"*

This passage tells us that, during the last week of His earthly life, whilst returning to Jerusalem from Bethany where He had spent the night, Jesus was hungry and, seeing a fig tree, he came to it looking for fruit. When He found none He placed a curse on the tree and it immediately withered away. The incident is also recorded in **Mark 11, verses 12-14 and 20-21.**

There is no doubt that the cursing of the barren fig tree is an event, which has down the years, been a source of bewilderment and unease in the minds of many Christians.



The question that is *implied*, if not actually expressed in this month's question, is, I think, "Why did Jesus destroy the fig tree?" And, on the basis of this incident critics of the Faith have been imagined they have found a flaw in His perfect character, and have been quick to accuse Him of acting in a petulant manner.

1. They think they have a strong case, because they are able to point out that Mark's account clearly states that '*it was not the season of figs,*' and so they conclude that Jesus was guilty of acting unjustly.

2. They also think that He revealed a common human weakness. They assume that He was tired as well as hungry, and when He could not find figs on the tree He became angry - He lost His temper, they say - and in anger, He passed this searing judgment on the tree.

Of course, Christians are not prepared to accept either of these interpretations of the event. We do not believe that Jesus was capable of either acting unjustly or of losing His temper. He was sometimes angry, as the scriptures reveal. But there is a world of difference between the justified anger He displayed and the petulant loss of temper, of which the critics accuse Him.

Nevertheless, some Christians do feel uncomfortable with the thought that His action *appears* to be uncharacteristic, because He came to save and heal, not to destroy, and in His ministry this is the only 'miracle of Judgment' on record.

*So, what are the facts?*

Well, consider, first of all, the time of year when this happened. It was April. This means it would be several weeks before figs were normally available. June was the time for figs.

Are we to suppose that Jesus did not know this? Of course He knew! His disciples knew! We have just seen that Mark states that it was '*not time for the figs.*'

But no-one chided Jesus for expecting to find figs on that particular tree - and you may be sure that they would have done so, if they had believed He had been acting illogically.

Read, in **Mark 5:30-31**, how, on an occasion, they gently reproached Him when they mistakenly felt He was being unreasonable!

Mark adds this note about the time for figs because he wants us to understand that both Jesus and His disciples knew something about fig trees in Palestine which His critics apparently do not! The Lord knew that this was a particular type of fig tree, a special feature of which was, that it produced the *first fruit*, and *then the leaves*.

If we read **Isaiah 28:4**, we find an expression which everyone at that time understood. '*A first ripe fig before the summer.*'

Look again at **Mark 11:13**, because there we see that it was *the presence of leaves* which drew the attention of Jesus to the tree. Those leaves meant that there should have been fruit on that particular tree. In fact, the Jews, themselves had a name for such a tree - tree which had leaves but no fruit. They called it '*a lying tree.*' It promised something that it did not produce.

Notice, also, that when Jesus pronounced judgment on the tree, His disciples did not react with shock or surprise. What *really* surprised them was the speed at which His words took effect.

There was no reason to accuse Jesus of behaving in an unreasonable manner, or to suspect Him of acting out of harmony with His mission to preserve life. The spirit of that ministry is revealed in the clearest possible terms in the prophecy of **Isaiah 61:1ff**, and it was to this prophecy that He drew the attention of John the Baptist, when, from His prison, He sent His disciples to question the Lord. See **Matt. 11:1ff**.

*The warning*

If we look at the incident as a kind of acted-parable, we see that the Lord's action in

cursing the fig tree, lay a warning for Jerusalem. It said, in effect, that the time had run out for the city.

If you turn to **Luke 13:6-9**, you will find the parable that Jesus told, about the 'Unfruitful Fig Tree.'

Here was a man who had a vineyard, in which he had planted a fig tree. Just *one* fig tree in a garden of vines. The owner came looking for fruit on the fig tree, and, when he was disappointed, he would have destroyed the unfruitful tree had not the Vinedresser pleaded with him to spare it for one more year.

The Vinedresser said that he would give the tree every opportunity of producing fruit . . . and then, if it failed . . .

Remember the significant detail. The parable concerns *one fig tree* in a vineyard.

Now this in itself is remarkable, because it was unusual for a fig tree to be planted in a vineyard. Notice that the tree was not there by accident. It had been planted there quite deliberately. Furthermore, we must bear in mind that the vineyard was not cultivated as hobby or pastime. Nor was it kept for its beauty, or as a garden for relaxation. It existed for the value of the fruit produced.

The solitary fig tree, on the other hand, was not planted in the vineyard because it was a viable business proposition. The Lord's parable highlights a very important difference between that one fig tree and all the other trees - the vines - in that garden.

The vines received *attention*. The fig tree received *affection!* In other words, the fig tree was not meant for the market, but for the owner's pleasure.

#### *Jerusalem the Fig Tree?*

Since, particularly in the Old Testament scriptures, the Vine consistently represents the nation, God's own people, in the New Testament the Fig tree clearly represents something else. I suggest that it represented the City - Jerusalem.

The day prior to the cursing of the unfruitful fig tree, as **John 11** records, Jesus had ridden into the city of Jerusalem in fulfilment of the prophecy of **Zech. 9:9**.

That entrance constituted His last offering of Himself to the city and the nation, as Messiah and King. But although there was a demonstration of popular enthusiasm, the leaders of the city were quite unmoved by His action, and in **John 12:37**, we read that Jesus departed and '*hid Himself from them,*' because '*though He done many signs before them, yet they believed not on Him.*'

You will recall that twice the Lord entered the city and cleansed the Temple; once at the beginning of His ministry as recorded in **John 2**, and once at the end as recorded in the very chapter from which this month's question arises - **Matt. 21**.

The first time, He had said, "*You shall not make My Father's house a house of trade.*"

The second time He said, "*It is written 'My house shall be called a house of prayer but you make it a den of robbers.'*"

Shortly after this, He would weep over the city and say, "*Your house is forsaken and desolate*" **Matt. 23:37-39**. The Temple was no longer '*My Father's house,*' and as the next chapter reveals, very soon afterward He told His disciples, when they proudly drew His attention to the massive stones in the Temple walls, "*There will not be left here one stone upon another, that will not be thrown down.*"

The rejection of Jesus by Israel and the shedding of His blood on the cross, brought to an end the Old Covenant and its religious system, including the Temple, its priesthood and sacrifices, and ended the significance of Jerusalem as the 'mother city' of the people of God.

A new covenant has been ratified, a new people created and a new 'capital' announced, a '*heavenly Jerusalem*' (**Heb. 12:22**). This the '*New Jerusalem*' of which the book of Revelation speaks, and which, in **Gal. 4:26**, Paul declares to be our '*mother.*'

The fate of both City and Temple was already sealed, and before long the Roman armies would bring the warning - and the prophecy - of Jesus, to fulfilment.

(*Questions to:* Frank Worgan, 5 Gryfebank Way, Houston, Renfrewshire. PA6 7NZ, Scotland.)

## THE INDISPENSABLE INGREDIENT

**"Without faith it is impossible to be well pleasing to God, for he that cometh to God must believe that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him"** (Heb. 11:6). Conviction and confidence that God is and that He rewards those who seek Him is a prime requisite for satisfactory living.

We speak of the necessary items for the preparation of a palatable dish as the ingredients. It is the same with living. There are some items that are positively essential to life if it is to be lived at its best.

One of these ingredients is FAITH and we are not confining this necessity to the religious realm alone. It is axiomatic that a child must believe his mother or his guardian, or die. The mother tells her little ones that fire burns, poison kills, water drowns, highways are dangerous, falls cripple and exposure makes ill. Whether the little ones like it or not, they can believe her or die.

The student of necessity believes his instructor or remains ignorant. A beginner comes to his teacher without knowledge of the tools of learning. He knows no letter of the alphabet. If he is ever to distil the treasures from the world of books, he has to believe his tutor when she points out that this character is "A" and this is "Z" or all the volumes of the world will remain locked and a mystery.

The business man must have faith in his fellowman or he can do no business. Letters of credit, cheques, credit cards are all largely a matter of faith. Sure there are some losses but think, if there were no faith there would be no business and whatever profit is gained would be impossible.

Then why is it thought strange that in the religious realm a man has to believe or perish? How expensive is man's scepticism! Our years are so brief, our experiences so narrow, how easy to be guilty of faulty observations, hasty generalisations or illogical or ill-informed conclusions. By faith we can begin where we must end if we refuse to believe.

If man could only bring himself to the point of faith, how many tragedies he could avoid, how much disappointment and failure he could prevent. Why do so many live such difficult lives? Because **"The way of the transgressor is hard"** (Prov. 13:15). Why do so many die prematurely? Because longevity, in many instances, is connected with doing the commandments of God. **"Children, obey your parents in the Lord; for this is right. Honour your father and mother (which is the first commandment with promise), that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth"** (Eph. 6:1-2). Why are our prayers unanswered?

Because we ask amiss or to spend what we seek selfishly. **"Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye might spend it in your pleasures"** (James 4:3). Why do many have such difficulties in living? Because they refuse to be put the Kingdom of God first. **"But seek ye first His kingdom, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you"** (Matt. 6:33).

This is not to say the godly never have any problems. But how differently are they affected by their trials! The attitude **"all things work together for good to them that love the Lord"** makes it impossible to overwhelm the man or the woman who takes this view of life. It makes for calm in the storm, gives strength for the long haul and peace in trials.

## VERSIONS OF GOD'S WORD

### THE "UNAUTHORISED" VERSION

The oldest version in the world was actually in existence before Moses wrote the book of Genesis, and its author has been around right from the beginning. He is very modest, so much so that he does not like his name to be used in conjunction with this version, and he does not want to take credit for it at all. There are quite a few contributing authors and editors connected with it.

This version is in widespread use throughout the world, and one of the most amazing things about it is; that every single religious organisation, of every imaginable stripe or colour known to man, has used this version at one time or another, and all have heartily endorsed it.

We in brotherhood find it being used, and we unwittingly endorse it. Although our preachers and teachers use it, we sometimes fail to recognise what version they are quoting from, and they themselves do not seem to realise that having memorised its passages so well that they do not always know that they are quoting from it. However it can be readily identified if we know what to look for. Some of the names and co-authors and editors are: Pride, Arrogance, Rebelliousness, Indifference and a few others of no less importance.

The easiest way to identify this version is by the way most passages begin. Usually they begin with the preamble: "In my opinion." Others are; "I think," or "I believe."

The very first mention of this version is found in Genesis, and it was no other than Eve who followed the teaching of it, when she determined *in her opinion*, that the fruit of the forbidden tree was, after all, very good to eat.

Many other examples throughout the Genesis account reveal the existence of this version of God's word. **Cain** is the very first example of "*I believe*" and obviously believed sincerely that what he offered to God as a sacrifice was at least as good, if not better, than that which his brother offered. By now, of course, you can easily guess the identity of the **author** of this version of God's word, and just how cunningly he uses men to employ his version. It is not always easy to notice when men are using this version, and a good example of this, from the Old Testament, is the account of Aaron's conduct in Exodus ch. 32:1-6. It is not recorded here what the thoughts of Aaron were, but we can see by his actions that no doubt he "*thought*" or must have said to himself, "*I think* we should make a golden calf."

Now if we want to avoid teaching others from this version we should be quite satisfied to use a preamble to our remarks such as, "**The Bible teaches in - book, chapter, verse the following**" etc., etc. Another way of teaching would be similar, i.e.: "**It says in - book, chapter and verse, so and so.**" Why can we be so sure that these are acceptable ways of teaching? Because it says in the book of 1st Peter chapter 4 verse 11 - "**If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever Amen.**"

An excellent opportunity and example of using God's word in answering a question was given to this writer when a brother questioned my use of Cain and Abel's conduct as an example of the use of other versions, saying that there was no recorded evidence in Genesis that God told Adam or any member of his family, what an acceptable sacrifice was. The answer to that is found, of course, in two passages of the New Testament: Rom. 10:17 "**so then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.**" And in Heb. 11:4 where it talks of Abel's faith and of Cain's lack of it.

This use of God's word in teaching puts one in the position of not having to

personally defend one's statements, and leaves any opposition to argue with God. Furthermore, if we have succeeded in convincing our listeners that the words are, without a doubt, scriptural, then we can take no credit, and we give the glory to God, and Jesus Christ, exactly as we should.

G. SILMAN,  
Chilliwack. B.C., Canada.

## SCRIPTURE READINGS

Oct. 1	1 Kings 19:1-18	Romans 11:1-21
Oct. 8	Jeremiah 31:23-34	Romans 11:22-36
Oct. 15	Proverbs 25:11-28	Romans 12
Oct. 22	Leviticus 19:1-18	Romans 13
Oct. 29	Isaiah 45:18-25	Romans 14

### GOD'S PURPOSE FOR ISRAEL AND THE WORLD

Romans chapter 11 is a profound chapter. Let me try and summarise it with the guidance of Moses E. Lard, whose commentary on the Roman letter I much admire. God has not wholly rejected Israel, as Paul's case itself would prove. To suppose them wholly rejected is to repeat the error of Elijah. In his day he surprisingly learned that seven thousand still remained true to Jehovah. Similarly, there is now a remnant of Israel, which has not been rejected. This chosen remnant is there by grace of God and not by works or perfect obedience. Israel sought to be retained as God's people, but failed through unbelief. The chosen, however, have been retained because they sought the honour by belief in Jesus. The rejected Jews have grown hard in heart and feeling as well as dull in perception - predicted by their very own prophets.

The Jews stumbled at Christ. Their stumbling contributed to the salvation of the Gentiles. If their fall proved advantageous to the Gentiles then their reception back into Divine favour will prove still more so. This implies that they may again be received. The Jews were rejected because of unbelief. Let them believe and acceptance will follow. And the Gentiles must stand by belief.

They must not grow proud or over-confident. For if God spared not the Jews when they did wrong, neither will He spare you, writes Paul. Towards the Jews God has been severe in cutting them off; towards you He has been kind. Live up to that kindness.

Hardness in part has happened to Israel until the full sum of the Gentiles come into the Church. By that time the hardness of Israel will give way, they will then become believers, and so a great many of them will be saved. You Gentiles should know this mystery to keep you from becoming puffed up with self-importance. The rejected Jews are still beloved on their father's account; and you Gentiles have now to preach the Gospel to them and so convert them to Christ. They are thus at last to realise the Divine mercy through you. Their fall has proved a blessing to you and your conversion is to prove a blessing to them. Great is the depth of God's resources and wisdom and knowledge in working out the redemption of the world. No one has ever been privy to His counsels, nor any imparted to Him aid. All things originate in Him and all things are for His honour and glory.

### HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

The Church is the body of Christ. All saints are members of it. Every member brings to the body his or her talent or talents, which should be used for the good of the body. I was speaking to a minister of the Church of Scotland the other day, who was telling me about the work he had to do. Such work should not be left to one individual. God never designed it this way. Every child of God is a minister and everyone has his or her part to play in the function of the body. In Paul's day, there were such gifts as

prophesying, teaching, serving, encouraging, contributing to the needs of others, leading, showing mercy, etc. Most of these gifts are still with us. It is our duty to develop whatever gift or gifts the Lord has bestowed upon us. The Parable of the Talents immediately springs to mind (Matt. 25:14-30).

Verses 9 to 21 are reminiscent of the Sermon on the Mount. The section contains "the injunctions to deep, unaffected and practical love" (F.F. Bruce). We read, for example, **"rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer, distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality"** (12-13). These along with the other injunctions are surely clear, plain and simple. However, they must all be worked at. They will manifest love, sympathy and honour within God's family and love and forgiveness to those outside the fellowship; indeed, even to those who persecute them for righteousness' sake.

#### **THE CHRISTIAN AND THE STATE**

I live in Scotland. It is part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. I am subject to the laws of the land. They are there for the good of all. Without the existence of "the higher powers," then there is no telling what life would be like in my country. I am glad God has ordained these powers (13:1).

Paul wrote the Roman letter when the human government was the Roman government. The Romans were not yet a persecuting power against the Christians. They were to become one later. The main point is this: "Human government is a Divine ordinance and the powers of coercion and commendation which it exercises have been entrusted to it by God, for the repression of crime and the encouragement of righteousness. Christians of all people, then, ought to obey the laws, pay their taxes and respect the authorities - not because it will be the worse for them if they did not, but because this is one way

of serving God" (F.F. Bruce). But what happens when those in authority exceed the powers delegated to them by God? If any decrees of civil magistrates conflict with the commandments of God the all Christians must say: **"We must obey God rather than man"** (Acts 5:29). **"But Christians will voice their 'No' to Caesar's unauthorised demands the more effectively if they have shown themselves ready to say 'Yes' to His authorised demands"** (Bruce).

#### **CHRISTIAN LIBERTY AND CHRISTIAN CHARITY**

I used to read the Jewish newspapers a lot. Many of them included columns dealing with readers' questions. They often asked about food and drink. For example, could they eat smoky-bacon crisps? Such reflected the seriousness in observing their dietary laws.

Many saints in New Testament times had similar scruples. A "hot" subject was butcher-meat sold in the market place. This very often had come from animals which had been sacrificed to a pagan deity. To eat or not to eat: that was the question for Christians living in a pagan city. (Paul, of course, dealt with this matter in greater detail in his first epistle to the Corinthians.) The great apostle gives sound advice to the Roman saints. **"Let us then pursue the things that make for peace and build up the common life. Do not ruin the work of God for the sake of food. Everything is pure in itself, but anything is bad for the man who by his eating causes another to fall. It is a fine thing to abstain from eating meat or drinking wine, or doing anything which causes your brother's downfall"** (14:19-22, N.E.B.) He also wrote: **"For the Kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit"** (17).

So we can say that the Christian has to be careful with his liberty in Christ. He has to be understanding and charitable. He has to give thought to the weaker brothers and sisters. He has to

remember that he is in a fellowship and he has to think always for the well-being of the fellowship. The Lion handbook to the Bible sums it up, well: "There are some matters of conscience over which Christians disagree . . . We should not try to force agreement and so create division. We ourselves may feel free to do things that would give a weaker Christian a bad conscience. That is no reason to despise him. We are answerable, not to one another, but to Christ. It is better to limit our own freedom than exercise it at a fellow Christians expense."

IAN S. DAVIDSON, Motherwell.

### TEST YOUR BIBLICAL KNOWLEDGE

1. She came to a well and in the end found a husband.
2. Who committed suicide with king Saul?
3. Who was Samuel's mother?
4. What caused Mephibosheth to be a cripple?
5. Who had a dream about the sun, the moon and the stars?
6. For whom did Jonathan have a deep affection?
7. Who had laboured to bring the gospel to Colossae?
8. Who was 'mighty in the Scriptures'?
9. Sapphira died how many hours after her husband?
10. Aquila was originally from here.

### OBITUARY

**Slamannan:** With profound sorrow we announce the death of Sis. Jean Neilson. She was admitted to Falkirk Royal Infirmary a few months ago where she passed away peacefully on Friday, 7th July at the age of 94 years.

Jean's early education was at Limerigg School, then Rosemount School, Slamannan, and Coatbridge. She went on to further her education in short-hand at a Glasgow College for one year gaining a diploma, then continued for

another year, gaining her FCTS Diploma. When Limerigg School celebrated its centenary, Jean as the oldest surviving former pupil was invited to the ceremony.

As an employee of McLay's College, Falkirk, Jean taught short-hand and later became the owner until her retiral. Her pupils had great esteem for her, and many kept contact with her in her retirement. One of her pupils took up a position in Buckingham Palace; he credited Jean with putting his foot on the first rung of the ladder of success.

The Church was her life where she was a member for 82 years, during which time she was a Sunday School teacher and assisted her sister Mary (who predeceased her 12 years ago) in the secretarial duties of the Church. Through failing health for the past few years Jean was unable to attend the meetings but always took interest in the affairs of the Church and the world at large.

The funeral service took place in the Church of Christ, Slamannan, on Thursday, 13th July with Bro. Peter Wilson (Slamannan) officiating and Bro. John Kneller (Tranent) at the graveside. A large number of mourners gathered at the graveside to pay their respects. Jean was a well-loved and respected member of the community. Those who knew her and loved her will miss her presence but will be comforted by her peace.

GRACE SNEDDON, Sec.

### THANKS

Family and relatives of the late Miss Jean Neilson wish to thanks friends for hospital visits, phone calls, sympathy cards and attendance at the funeral. A special thanks to Sis. May and Bro. Peter Wilson (Slamannan) for their love and devotion to Jean over the years.

God Bless You All.

GRACE SNEDDON, Sec.

Bro. Peter and Sis. May Wilson wish to thank those who sent cards and good

wishes on the occasion of their Golden Wedding. God Bless You All.

## COMING EVENTS

### CHURCH AT PETERHEAD

#### Special weekend

Dates/Times:

Saturday, 16th September, 7.00 p.m.  
 Sunday, 17th September, 10.00 a.m.,  
 11.00 a.m., 6.00 p.m.

*Speaker: Andy Scott (Kirkcaldy) D.V.*

#### Gospel Mission

Dates/Times: Wednesday, 15th  
 to Sunday 19th November  
 Wednesday to Saturday, 7.00 p.m.  
 Sunday, 10.00 a.m., 11.00 a.m.,  
 6.00 p.m.

*Speaker: Frank Worgan D.V.*

#### Social Weekend

Dates: 7th-8th October (inclusive)  
 Times: Saturday 7th - 3.00 p.m.  
 Sunday, 8th - 10.00 a.m., 11.00 a.m.  
 and 6.00 p.m.

*Speakers: John Morgan (Hindley)  
 Mitch Vick (Stirling)*

*A warm welcome awaits all.*

### ANNIVERSARY MEETING

#### Kentish Town, London

To be held October 7th at 3.00 p.m.  
 Tea at 4.45 p.m. and  
 Evening Meeting at 6.30 p.m.  
*Speaker: John Kneller (Tranent)*

### ANNUAL SOCIAL

#### Newtongrange:

Saturday, 14th October,  
 at 4.00 p.m.

*Speaker: Bro. Alan Moyes (Kirkcaldy)  
 A Warm Welcomes To All*

## QUESTION BOX

"Q.B." is potentially the most valuable part of the "Scripture Standard" and we are currently in the privileged position of receiving answers of the highest quality, but "Q.B." depends, of course, upon a regular flow of questions. So please don't allow Frank to run out of questions. We **all** benefit from your questions, and the answers. So please keep them coming.

Thank you.

EDITOR.

1. Rebekah or Rebecca (Genesis 24).
2. His armour-bearer (1 Samuel 3:5).
3. Hannah (1 Samuel 1:20).
4. The nurse dropped him (2 Samuel 4:4).
5. Joseph (Genesis 37:9-10).
6. David (1 Samuel 18:1).
7. Ephraim (Colossians 1:7).
8. Apollon (Acts 18:24).
9. Three (Acts 5:7).
10. Pontus (Acts 18:2).

## ANSWERS

THE SCRIPTURE STANDARD is published monthly.

PRICE PER COPY— POST PAID FOR ONE YEAR

UNITED KINGDOM.....	£9.00	
OVERSEAS BY SURFACE MAIL.....	£10.00	(\$16.00US or \$20.00Can)
OVERSEAS BY AIR MAIL.....	£14.00	(\$22.00US or \$28.00Can)

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"The Scripture Standard" is printed for the publishers by

Lothian Printers, 109 High Street, Dunbar, East Lothian. EH42 1ES Tel: (01368) 863785