

The **SCRIPTURE STANDARD**

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

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AND BE YE THANKFUL

PROBABLY nothing irks us more than the apparent ingratitude of others. When we do something for someone and scarcely receive any acknowledgement of the fact then human nature is inclined to make us say, "Well that's the last time I do anything for him". If God took that attitude with us then perhaps He would do nothing at all for us. Men in general have much to be thankful to God for, and disciples of Christ have everything to be thankful for. Yet it must be true to say that often we are all guilty of being unthankful: many times to our fellowmen, and oftentimes to God. It is also tragically true that often the people of God' are less thankful to God than those outwith the pale. Jesus remarked upon the fact more than once. Take, for instance, the occasion when Christ cleansed the ten lepers, as recorded for us in Luke 17:11-18. "And it came to pass, as He went to Jerusalem, that He passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. And as He entered into a certain village, there met Him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off: And they lifted up their voices and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us. And when He saw them, He said unto them, Go show yourselves unto the priests. And it came to pass, that as they went, they were cleansed. And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God. And fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks; and he was a Samaritan. And Jesus answering, said, Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger". I daresay that God has, down through the ages, had cause to wonder where the ninety-percent in each generation are. Jesus was not personally soliciting thanks but He had expected the lepers to give glory and praise to God for the miraculous cure. Of the ten lepers cured, therefore a staggeringly low number returned to give thanks i.e. only one, and he was not a Jew but 'a stranger' - a Samaritan. We recall that it was also a Samaritan who eclipsed completely the Jews (the people of God) as far as kindness and compassion was concerned in the story of the Good Samaritan.

Another instance is contained in Luke 4:22-28. Jesus, on this occasion, was commenting on the fact that prophets, generally speaking, are not without honour save in their own country, and that in His particular case they were not likely to see Him do the mighty works He had done in Capernaum. To them He 'was but Joseph's son' - they did not see Him as the Messiah of God. Elsewhere He was regarded differently and particularly amongst the gentiles. He says, "Verily I say unto you, No prophet is accepted in his own country. But I tell of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up for three years and six months,

when great famine was throughout all the land; But unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow. And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet: and none of them was cleansed, save Naaman the Syrian. And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath". Certainly the truth hurts and the only reaction these Jews, who were listening to Jesus, could produce was one of anger and wrath - albeit He was telling them the truth. They had not changed. The generation of Jews in Christ's time was in much the same condition as the generation at the time of Elias and Elisha. There was no shortage of widows in the days of Elias and there were plenty of lepers in Israel in the days of Elisha but these prophets had so little honour in their own country that they bestowed their blessings elsewhere to people, apparently, more worthy. What an indictment of the Jews - "what a commentary on their hardness of heart and their ingratitude to God. God bypassed all the widows in Israel at the time of the famine and saved one, a gentile; and God bypassed all the lepers in Israel and saved one, a Syrian: a gentile. And thus we see the possibility, of God's 'called out people' proving themselves to be less worthy of the blessings of God than the nations around about them - notwithstanding the smug proclamation that "we have the word of God to tell us that we are the people of God". The Jews also had the word of God and it also told them that they were the chosen people of God - but their character did not comply with their pedigree. Let us therefore be like the leper who turned back and with a loud voice glorified God.

The apostle Paul exhorts us thus in 1 Thess. 5:18 "Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God concerning you". The Psalmist said, (Psalm 100:4) "Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise; be thankful unto him and bless his name".

There appears to be a link between the giving of thanks and the praising of His name and a distinct association between the two. Hence it is inherent in the matter of giving God thanks that we also praise His name. This would appear to be what Jesus meant when He spoke to the leper of "Giving glory to God". Again the Psalmist describes thanksgiving as a sacrifice to God - "And let them sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving, and declare His works with rejoicing". (Psalm 107:22). Our thanks therefore would appear not to be confined to a quiet prayer of thanks but an outburst of joy from a grateful heart. Rather like, I suppose, the leper cured by Jesus (on another occasion) and recorded in Mark 1:40 where, although Jesus had instructed him not to mention it he could not contain his gratitude "But went out and began to publish it much, and blaze abroad the matter, insomuch that Jesus could no more openly enter the city, but was without in the desert places; and they came to Him from every quarter". In Matt. 15: 30 we read that great multitudes came unto Jesus, "having with them those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed and many others, and cast them down at Jesus feet: and He healed them: Insomuch that the multitude wondered, when they saw the dumb to speak, the maimed to be whole, the lame to walk, and the blind to see: and they glorified the God of Israel". To 'glorify God' means to acknowledge, honour and praise Him, and these witnesses of Christ's mighty works did not just mumble a few words of thanks but being unable to contain themselves they enthusiastically praised and glorified the God of Israel. Similarly, when 'Jesus raised the widow's son at Nain (Luke 7:16) "there came a fear on all: and they glorified God..." At the crucifixion of Jesus even the Centurion when he saw what was done, glorified God.

The exhortation to be thankful is continuous in the scriptures, for we require to be constantly reminded. The human being is frail indeed and his memory is short and his gratitude quite often but temporary. In Gen. 40:23 we read that in spite of what Joseph did for the king's butler, "Yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgot him". In 2 Chron. 24:22 we read "Thus Joash remembered not the kindness which Jehoiada his father had done to him, but slew his son. And when he died, he said, The Lord look upon it, and require it". There is also a tendency for us to take God's blessings for granted and with the passage of time forget our indebtedness to Him. We have much for which we ought to give God thanks and He is worthy of all praise. Like the leper we would do well not only to thank Him but also in our gratitude to "publish it much abroad". It may have been a long time since last we "blazed abroad" the wonderful works of God.

“HOLD TRUE TO WHAT WE HAVE ATTAINED” (PHIL. 3:16)

INCREASINGLY today can be seen the movement away from the divine authority of God as expressed in the scriptures, to ‘new and better ways’ developed by men to suit their selfish needs. And yet in the midst of such backslidings there has not been heard one voice warning of the condemnation which awaits such error.

Too often has the feeling been expressed that such groups are so far from the truth as to be lost. Again, too often has been shown a refusal to listen. In standing apart we have become so concerned with not compromising that we no longer know the ‘why’ of the errors, and so, are in no position to remove them.

The problem today is the same that which confronted the Leodician church of the Revelations, which faced eternal condemnation for apathy. Christians today are generally presenting a facade to the world; and the world is taking it as seriously as most church members.

In Revelation we read of a condemnation to those who do not strive toward the perfection that Christ would have for his kingdom (Rev. 1:3). In Jeremiah we read “cursed is he who does the work of the Lord with slackness and cursed is he who keeps back his sword from bloodshed (Jer. 48:10). Knowing that the word of the Lord is a sharp two edge sword (Heb. 4:12), which is part of our equipment against Satan (Eph. 6:10), we must ask ourselves if our swords are blood stained.

Throughout history such slackness as we now experience may be seen. And yet also may be seen great reformers who strove to preach God’s word in its simplicity. Men such as Wesley and Campbell, who today would be termed ‘strict’ received at the time of their mission as much support for their observance of God’s word as meets those today who desire a total return to that will.

The world is in desperate need of hearing God’s word, and growth within our churches is assured provided that word is spoken (Is. 55:11). In the face of dwindling numbers we can draw but two conclusions. One, that we are not speaking loud enough to be heard, or two, we are not speaking God’s word (1 Pet. 4:11).

It is not my place to suggest for which of these two reasons the Lord’s church in England lies, but, it must be ensured that each of us is certain that neither can be blamed on us. The church must grow, that the world may see a united kingdom on earth, that we may offer some hope to the lost or a united salvation in eternity. Let us not forget that ‘through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the principalities’ (Eph. 3:10). If this is not happening then the blame can lie nowhere except with us.

We must ensure that we teach truth, and must be certain that we are heard. Let us ‘Remember then from what we have fallen, and repent and do the works we did before’ (Rev. 2:5).

Such divisions as exist today are not based so much on misinterpretation of God’s word, but rather on a misunderstanding of to what extent that word is a source of authority. Today it is the ‘cunning of men’ (Eph. 4:11) which leads so many, rather than the Lord. “Therefore we must pay the closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it” (Heb. 2:1-3).

We are being asked to believe no divisions of importance exist, or at least, that we should be prepared to ‘give a little’. Oh, how the words of Jeremiah ring true; “They have healed the wound of my people lightly saying ‘Peace, Peace’ when there is no peace” (Jer. 6:14). Christ’s gospel is not one of peace (Matt. 10:34), and to ask that his word is compromised is to reap condemnation of ourselves.

Those churches who at one time held to God’s word, published in their magazine, the Christian Advocate, “Alliance involves compromise, and the Lord will bring unity”. Such an attitude is one that has been used by the ‘christian’ world much today. But it opposes scripture

"How can two walk together unless they be agreed" (Amos 3:3). "In vain do such men worship the Lord, teaching as precepts the doctrines of men" (Matt. 15:8,9).

Let us not be lead by men, but rather by God, "The way of man is not in himself, that it is not in man who walks to direct himself" (Jer. 10:23).

The church has seen throughout its history, stages of division caused by men's desire for a society other than that of the Lord's kingdom. In A.D. 97 Clement of Rome wrote of an "odious and unholy breach of unity among you which is quite incompattible with God's chosen people". How true the sentiment, but let us look to a possible cause for such division. In but three years from that letter Clement was advocating the sole authority of one Bishop. The drift had begun. The fall of the church, even in those early days, was based on man's desire to centralise. To preach a gospel in a bigger 'and better' way than God had advocated, Such is the battle that honest men have fought till this day. In our own history we see the church divided, and rightly, on doctrinal issues (1 Cor. 11:19). And yet today, again we can see the movement away from adherence to God's word. Have we not learned, Brethren, that there can be no unity "in one body", unless we 'are of one hope' (Eph. 4:4). Let us not be those "who say to the seers, "see not", and to the prophets, "prophesy not to us what is right, speak to us smooth things, prophesy illusions, leave the way, turn aside from the path, let us hear no more of the Holy One on Israel" (Isaiah 30:10)

Brethren, as many good men try to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, there are others among us who teach a version corrupted by additions and deviations. No longer can we be tolerant of such error: "The time of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands men every where to repent" (Acts 17-30). Let us not be partakers of such error. Rather let us strive to retain our convictions.

Finally, I can do no better than to quote from a man to be well admired, a preacher of God's word, J.D. Tant. "Brethren, don't forget, we are drifting". "Take heed to yourself and to your teaching for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers" (1 Tim. 4:16).

KIM. J. BOLAND

ASK

"Yet work, O Lord, in me,
As Thou for me hast wrought;
And let my love the answer be
To grace Thy love has brought".

"Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us". Ephesians 3:20.

ASK WHAT DO I ASK? ASK WHEN DO I ASK?

WE continue our meditation on the subject of Prayer, and invite you again to the book of Nehemiah, in the hope that we may glean from God's most precious word, some lessons that may help us in the coming days.

NEHEMIAH A MAN OF GOD NEHEMIAH A MAN OF PRAYER

Last month we considered Nehemiah's prayer, which was one of confession of the sins of the children of Israel, and also of his own sins. This month we are to consider among other things a prayer without words. It would appear that Nehemiah was a very modest man, there was no boasting of the position he held in the King's palace, a seemingly casual mention is made at the end of chapter one "For I was the King's cupbearer". Alexander Whyte tells us: The Persian cupbearer was far more than a cupbearer. He was the royal favourite above all the rest of the palace, till his privileges and his powers and his wealth were all a proverb. He was able to keep a table and set up an equipage at his own expense like a prince. Daniel's youthful beauty, his graces of character and manner, his shining talents, and his high state-services may all be borrowed and set down as the opening pages of Nehemiah's memoirs of himself".

Picture in your mind this wonderful scene, this man of the captivity, who by sheer persistency, and honesty of purpose, had climbed the ladder of success, and how now amidst all the trappings and splendour of the palace, was in the presence of the King, holding this very important position - the King's cupbearer.

Something strange had happened to Nehemiah, his countenance had altered, he was sad in the presence of the King, and this had never happened before. "Now I had not been before-time sad in his presence" Chapter 2 verse 1. Shall we stay a moment while we receive a lesson from this man of God. How often we are down in the dumps, and make no bones about it, and go about mourning and groaning, and shedding gloom and looking anything but filled with the joy of the Lord. Of course there are times when one is sad, and this day the King saw that his cupbearer was not his usual self, and said to Nehemiah:- "Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? this is nothing else but sorrow of heart". Then the King was given the reason for the sadness of his servant:- "Let the King live for ever: why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my father's sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire?" God's chosen people in great affliction and reproach the wall of Jerusalem broken down the gates burned with fire night and day these facts had been with this man of God, and they so filled his soul, that he could not but be saddened, and the King saw the result in the face of his cupbearer. Then the King said unto me, For what dost thou make request?" Verse 2.

"SO I PRAYED TO THE GOD OF HEAVEN"

Fancy standing before the King, and being asked a question, and before answering, praying to the God of heaven. What a glorious example for God's children:- That telephone call, that calls for a hasty decision, do you stop for a moment, to consult your Father. That letter you feel calls for a sharp answer, take your time, count ten, or better still, pray to the God of heaven. That temptation set up by the wiles of the Devil, do you stay awhile, to call on the recourses of heaven, so that you can resist, so that he may flee from you. That business decision to be made in a hurry, have you time to send up a short prayer for help and guidance, so that the result will be for God's glory. That church problem, that may cause much unhappiness, the decision you are asked to make, how about taking it to the Lord in prayer.

Nehemiah, before the king, who asked:- "For what dost thou make request?" took a little time to shoot up a prayer to the mercy seat. The line was open and God's servant took advantage of the opportunity, and the prayer like a rocket sped heavenward :- "so I prayed to the God of heaven".

ASK WHAT SHALL I ASK? "SO I PRAYED TO THE GOD OF HEAVEN"

I should dearly love to tell you what Nehemiah said, in that prayer, but we are not told, if I get to heaven I must make an appointment with this man who was the King's cupbearer, and make a request to him, to find out the burden of that prayer, and the answer from his God. What we can be assured of is the fact that he prayed, and God answered. You can also be sure of this, the prayer was not long-winded. This was not the time to pray for the sick or sad, the lonely tempted and tried, the dying or bereaved, at that moment he had no time to remember one and all before the throne of grace. His prayer was short and to the point, up went the prayer, down came the answer.

"So I prayed to the God of heaven"

"And I said unto the King".

Shall we stay for a short while, to be reproved, corrected, and instructed, by this short prayer of Nehemiah's. The Lord has been very gracious to us many a time on Lord's Day morning, when we have seen a little of the beauty and glory of our Lord Jesus. We have seen Him as the "Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace" Isaiah 9:6. We can say with the two disciples who went to a village called Emmaus, and had the joy of hearing the Lord Jesus speak said:- "Did not our hearts burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures"? Luke 24:32. Yet, I wonder if we could not have further joy, if we sought to elevate our Lord, when we have our season of prayer on behalf of the church, during the time set apart for the brethren to pray on behalf of the assembly. Let us not forget that we can be led by prayer, to the wilderness, to the quiet place.

the garden of Gethsemane, to the place called Calvary, yes and on to the Risen Christ. Shall we not forget Him in our prayers, and shall we try to make our prayers brief and to the point so that more and more of our brethren may be constrained to lift up their voices to our Father in prayer. Dr. Grenfell, of Labrador, told how as a medical student at the London hospital he entered a mission place in the east end. An elderly man was praying at great length and wearying the people. A young man said, "Shall we sing a hymn while our brother finishes his prayer?" That young man was D. L. Moody. Dr. Grenfell added, "I stayed after that, and determined that life should be worth while for me".

ASK WHEN DO I ASK? "SO I PRAYED TO THE GOD OF HEAVEN".

The Psalmist prayed in the Daytime ... In the night season.

"O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent:"

Psalm 22:2

The Psalmist prayed evening, and morning, and at noon

"Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice."

Psalm 55:17

"In the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up". Psalm 5:3.

Daniel prayed three times a day.

"Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime". Daniel 6:10.

Paul and Silas prayed at midnight.

"And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them".

Acts 16:25

In times of temptation

"Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak".

Matthew 26:41

When you feel the need of forgiveness for your many sins.

"Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving kindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions". "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin..." "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow". "Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities". "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me..." "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit..." "O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise".

Psalm 51:1,2,7,9,10,12,15.

In Trouble in affliction

"He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him. With long life will I satisfy him, and shew him my salvation" Psalm 91: "Is any among you afflicted? let him pray" James 5:13.

[15,16.

When people despitefully use you.

"But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them, which despitefully use you, and persecute you". Matt. 5:44. Always

"And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint".

Luke 18:1

"Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer". Romans 12:12.

"Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints"

Eph. 6:18.

"Pray without ceasing".

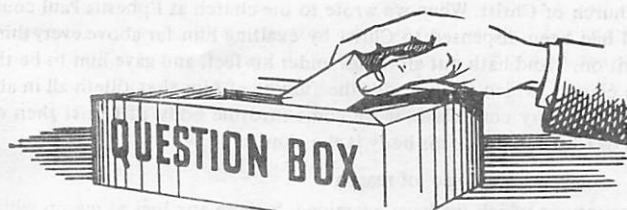
1 Thess. 5:17.

ASK WHAT DO I ASK?

ASK WHAT DO I ASK?

May the Lord's richest blessing be your portion.

LEONARD MORGAN



Conducted by
Alf Marsden

“Can a person who is immersed into Christ attend a church of his/her own choice after immersion, or is baptism intimately related to the church as revealed in Matt. 16:18?”

WE seem to be getting an increasing number of people who, on hearing the gospel, ask to be immersed into Christ and then state that they want to attend a church of their own choice thereafter. This is causing a little heart-searching among some brethren, and also presenting a problem of interpretation of the scriptures as the question implies. I think I have discussed something along these lines in a previous question, but I believe the subject to be so important that it will do us no harm to discuss it further. I think our first step is to try to find out what happens when a person is immersed into Christ.

What happens at immersion?

There are several things that happen when a person is immersed into Christ and a clarification of them will assist us in answering the question.

1 Our sins are remitted. This is fundamental to the gospel, and Peter put it quite clearly when he stated on the Day of Pentecost to the assembled throng, “Repent, and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:37). Relating this to the blood of Christ, Paul wrote to the Ephesian Christians, “In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace” (Eph. 1:7). Jesus always claimed that he had the power to forgive sins, particularly expressed in the case of the man sick of the palsy, “But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house” (Matt. 9:6). That same power is inherent in the gospel, whereby forgiveness of sins is promised when we are obedient to it.

2 We receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. In Acts 2:37 after Peter had made the statement regarding the forgiveness of sins, he went on to say, “And ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”. This is not the dispensation of miraculous powers to the individual, but the actual indwelling of the Spirit. As Paul said when he wrote his letter to Corinth, “What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Cor. 6:19-20).

3 We come into the kingdom of Christ. Paul reminds the Colossian Christians that they should always be grateful to God, because, “He hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son” (Col. 1:13). Christ is now king, for he has a kingdom. His reign was proclaimed to the world on the first Pentecost after his ascension (Acts 2:30-36). It started after, not before, he made purification for our sins, and it will continue until the last enemy, death, is conquered (1 Cor. 15:24-28).

4 We come into the one body. “For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptised into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many” (1 Cor. 12:12-14). Paul then goes on to develop the metaphor of the body and concludes by saying, “Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular” (v. 27). So when we are baptised we come into the body of Christ.

5 We come into the church of Christ. When we wrote to the church at Ephesus Paul could say that the power of God had been dispensed to Christ by exalting him far above everything and everyone. He then went on, "And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all" (Eph. 1:22,23). The argument is very conclusive; if we come into the body of Christ then we must come into the church of Christ, because his body is the church.

The logic of reason

In the light of the scriptures which we have examined, is there any logical reason which could be advanced for a person to go to a church of his own choice after baptism? We must always remember that when Jesus gave his Great Commission to his disciples (Matt. 28:19-20), he ended by saying, "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world". In the light of this statement, let us ask a few more questions.

Would a newly-born child of God be taught to observe the kingship and rule of the Christ who saved him? Most people would say amen to that; of course he would. But how could a person be said to accept the rule of Christ if his first act was to want to leave the church of Christ where he could come under the direct rule of his saviour? The only valid reason for such a course of action would be if the person thought that all churches constituted the church of Christ. If one believed that, then it would seem that there was no need for a distinctive witness at all; just go along with whatever your particular church teaches.

What about the observation of the fellowship? Is it logical for a person to be baptised into Christ, enter into fellowship with many brothers and sisters in Christ and then calmly walk out of the family never to be seen again by the other members of the family? I think not. Surely one of the most important aspects of fellowship is the meeting together with those of like mind, sharing their joys and their sorrows, working together with them for the extension of the gospel, meeting to remember the Lord who saved them from sin and its consequences. Surely, to walk away cannot be right. I cannot think that the Lord would have made an arrangement like that.

I suppose that the observation of the purity of the word of God would also be a must. Why does a person have to come to a church of Christ in order to be taught about immersion in water for the forgiveness of sins? I'll tell you why; its because the church which they normally attend does not teach it. But when such a person hears it taught he wants to obey it because he can see that it is true; the strange thing is that he wants to return voluntarily to the place where the truth was not taught. Isn't that amazing. There is no logic in that. And so we could go on enumerating many other things which are equally strange but time and space do not permit. I think we have said enough to illustrate the point quite well.

The dilemma

I realise that when a person requests baptism after a gospel address that it is very difficult to refuse such a request, indeed we may have no scriptural warrant for refusal. But I do think that we should make it perfectly clear to the person precisely what is entailed in the acceptance of the Lord Christ in baptism. As I have tried to show, it is something more than just having our sins forgiven; it is a direct relationship with deity. We must make it perfectly clear that if a person is expected to obey the Lord in baptism then that person is obliged to obey him, nay, would want to obey him in all other things. Nothing less than this will do.

For my own part, I would always teach that it is not the prerogative of the baptised believer to select his or her own church; Christ has done that for us. Even so, Amen.
(All questions please to Alf Marsden, 377 Billinge Road, Highfield, Wigan, Lancs.).

There is no conflict between the Old and the New; the conflict is between the false and the true.

THE men who try to do something and fail are infinitely better than those who try to do nothing and succeed.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

SEPTEMBER 1977

4—Genesis 22:1-19	James 2
11—1 Kings 3:1-15	James 3
18—Isaiah 57	James 4
25—Psalm 103	James 5

RESPECT OF PERSONS

WE read in the law (Lev. 19:15) "Thou shalt do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty". James had this in mind when dealing so plainly with the danger of distinction in treatment of people in (or out of) the church by members of it. Comments in his letter indicate addition to the church of quite eminent Jews. We know that some had habits of mind and general attitudes brought over from pharisaic upbringing. It was not easy to change, and Judaisers so troublesome to Paul sought to put Moses above Christ (Gal. 5:4). So James rebukes the tendency to snobbish behaviour in our first few verses this month. Please also look at 3:1 and 13:4,11,13 and 5:1-6 where prosperous persons are in view. Some church buildings these days are too respectable for a poor person to feel at home in — wall to wall carpets, smart pews, superior decorations and air-conditioning do not tie up with self-denial and the Christ-like life while two-thirds of our fellows are short of food. Nevertheless it would be wrong to suppose that either poverty or riches change the gospel message. The royal (supreme) law to love thy neighbour as thyself forbids "respect of persons" (Gal. 5:14). Let us always avoid the attitude and its expression.

Faith and Works

We feel no difficulty in reconciling James's plain words with 'salvation by grace through faith' (Phil. 2:12 & 13). It is quite certain Paul never taught that faith ALONE saves. We know that we cannot earn salvation by our works. No man can get to heaven through his own righteousness for no man ever lived sinless. Sanctification by the blood of Jesus must be our plea. On the other hand it is just as obvious that every Christian must in his new life in Christ manifest the spirit of His Saviour, giving

obedience to His commands. This however is a growth after birth "of water and the Spirit". There is too frequently an objection and silence respecting baptism as though this obedience were a "work of the law", and therefore cannot save. Of course alone it cannot save but it is difficult to see how a reasonable person can expect to reach forgiveness and eternal life if he refuses obedience in this or any other way, save that in which our human nature proves weak and remains defective. In John's first letter we read the truth — "If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves" but also "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive...and to cleanse" (1 John 1:8&9). We cannot be saved by merely thinking the gospel though that is a necessary pre-requisite to both believing, repenting, confessing and obeying the initial command.

Use of the Tongue

It is unlikely any of us sufficiently appreciate the importance of speech. It is so easy to speak. Words slip out almost involuntarily. We do need James's warnings as it is so possible to do either good or harm by even a single word. Sometimes we may be talking all day, and sometimes only a very few words. The few could well be more effective if well chosen than the whole day's. The circumstances of life change but the need of careful thought before speech remains. The contrast between right and wrong uses are epitomised in ch. 3, verses 15 to 18. There is the worldly wisdom producing earthly, devilish and sensual results with consequent confusion and wickedness, but heavenly wisdom results in purity, peace, gentleness, open-mindedness, mercy and other good. It does so without favouritism or pretence. In this connection James repeats the instructions in the "sermon" on the mount (5:12) where Jesus deals with the matter of swearing oaths, demanding purity of speech (Matt. 5:35-37). We are of course also reminded of what Jesus said in dealing with the accusation of demon-possession — "Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment", and closely related the fact "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (Matt. 12:34 & 38). How searching and solemn are the thoughts. Wisely indeed James writes "In many things we all stumble" (3:2) and how easily in this particular. Much grace, divinely supplied is needed to guard against failure and sin in this respect. David's prayer concluding Psalm

139 may well be repeated here - "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me". Again he writes "Thy word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against Thee (Psa. 119:11). Only the purification of the innermost springs of our being by the presence of Jesus can avail for the purification of our speech. Shall we consider James's words indicating the vital importance of this point - "But above all things" (5:12).

Worldliness and its fruits

Discontent and selfishness lead to strife, and it is sad that James has to write such severe things to readers designated "the twelve tribes". It is a shocking thought that any of them can be said to Kill - can it be a figure of speech for envy as apparently the King James translators thought might be the case. There seems to be no doubt about the word, however, being in the original. We are surprised and shocked at the thought but we do know from profane history - the Jewish historian Josephus - that between the time of Jesus and the destruction of Jerusalem, the most violent sectarian strife took place in the Jewish nation, murder being common and life cheap in clashes between rival groups. We cannot think such would be possible among Jews converted to Christ. The pages of history are stained with blood shed in this way among professing Christian bodies and so-called Christian nations, giving the enemies of God a supposed justification for condemning Christianity. Such behaviour is of course a contradiction of its word and spirit. Whether "kill" is literal or not, the description in ch. 4 of failure to subject our desires to God's will produces the conditions James rebukes, rejection of prayer by God and estrangement from one another and from God. The people of God are regarded in scripture as His bride, and unfaithfulness is spiritual adultery. The words "adulterers and" are omitted in other translations. The selfishness which demands God's blessing according to our wishes, quarrels with our fellows, craves for worldly satisfaction, speaks evil of brethren (4:11), and plans without humble reliance on God comes in for rebuke as does in ch. 5 riches without concern for others.

Patience and Prayer

This letter concludes with pithy and practical instructions. First a reminder to wait patiently for the Saviour's return, not just

standing by but like the husbandman having done and doing duties as they come and while suffering - and here we may turn back to the opening encouragement to meet that with courage and joy - remember the example of Job with assurance that in the end all will be well. In affliction find help in the church and make continual use of humble and fervent prayer. In this there is the example of Elijah, the prophet who prayed and waited. Prayer too is to be exercised mutually, seeking blessing upon one another, and relying always upon the Lord

R. B. SCOTT

THE following newspaper clipping was sent to me by Bro. Allan Ashurst. It proves that the experts are sometimes wrong with their estimates. (Ed.)

FAMOUS CAVE REOPENS AND BEATS A THEORY

THE famous Poole's Cavern near Buxton, Derbyshire will reopen to the public at Easter and its closure for 11 years has disproved the theory that stalagmites take thousands of years to form.

Mr. Selwyn Jepson, the resort activities manager for the High Peak, said experts had been astonished to find that stalagmites - which grow upwards - had formed on the footpaths of the 1,000 ft. long cavern.

"There is a theory that they grow something like an inch every 10,000 years, but here we have had stalagmites forming two or three inches high in eleven years", said Mr. Jepson.

The cavern cut from limestone by an underground stream, has been rewired and relit and the venture has been helped by local authority and Countryside Commission grants and loans.

STEP by step, we climb day by day
Closer to God with each prayer we pray
For the cry of the heart offered in prayer
Becomes just another spiritual stair
In a heavenly staircase leading us to,
A beautiful place where we will live anew
So never give up, for it's worth the climb
To live forever in endless time
Where the soul of man is safe and free
to live in love through Eternity.

From a sister in England

WHAT IS A FLAG?

ONLY a cheap piece of coloured cloth in reality, but what importance becomes attached to national flags when they have been fought over, captured in battle, and people have died for them. The flags of other countries mean little to us, but our own is full of significance.

Likewise, our faith becomes deeper when we and our fellow Christians have worked, made sacrifices and struggled for it. Then we see it as something to be preserved and handed on. So, Christian, commit yourself to the cause, if you really want to feel it is your own.

Miss R. M. PAYNE, Reading, Berks.

Now apply it. Christianity is the product. YOU are the salesman—but, which salesman? Have you ever batted the question around among fellow brethren, 'How do the Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, et. al., do it? Why are they growing?'. Could it be brethren, that we are "gathered in the back office" saying, 'Verily, religion declineth among the people, there are no longer those who seek the truth. It is of no use to conduct the gospel meeting, and the sending forth of the piece that is printed cometh to naught. To speak to him that liveth close by is vain, and to admonish the erring accomplisheth nothing'. Could those in the 'back office' be members of the church of Christ?"

From "The Light"

SMILE ... BUT MAKE THE APPLICATION**The Salesman**

And in those days, behold, there came through the gates of the city a salesman from afar off, and it came to pass as the day went by he sold it plenty.

And in that city were they that were the order takers and they that spent their days adding to the alibi sheets. Mightily were they astonished. Then said they one to another "How getteth he away with it?" And it came to pass that many were gathered in the back office and a soothsayer came among them. And he was one wise guy! And they spoke and questioned him saying, "How is it that this stranger accomplished the impossible?"

Whereupon the soothsayer made answer: "He of whom you speak is one hustler. He ariseth very early in the morning and goeth forth full of pep. He complaineth not, neither doth he know despair. He is arrayed in purple and fine linen, while ye go forth with pants unpressed.

"While ye gather here and say one to the other, 'Verily, this is a terrible day to work', he is already abroad. And when the eleventh hour cometh, he needeth no alibis. He knoweth his line and they that would stave him off, they give him orders. Men say unto him 'nay' when he cometh in, yet when he goeth forth he hath their names on the line that is dotted.

"He taketh with him the two angels, 'inspiration' and 'perspiration' and worketh exceedingly. Verily I say unto you, go and do likewise".

LIFE CAN BE BETTER

WE may, if we choose, make the worst of one another. Every one has his weak points: every one has his faults; we may make the worst of these; we may fix our attention constantly upon these. But we may also make the best of one another. We may forgive, even as we hope to be forgiven. We may put ourselves in the place of others, and ask what we should wish to be done to us, and thought of us, were we in their place. By loving whatever is lovable in those around us, love will flow back from them to us, and life will become a pleasure instead of a pain; and earth will become like heaven; and we shall become not unworthy followers of Him whose name is Love.

NEWS FROM THE CHURCHES

Slamannan: The congregation in Slamannan see a great need for preaching the gospel on Lord's Day morning and evening and would be much encouraged if brethren from sister churches could come along and help. We should be glad to hear from brethren who feel they could assist us in this way. It would be advantageous to us if we could have a visiting brother once per month.

Please contact the secretary:-

Mary S. Neilson, Marthom, Station Road, Slamannan, Falkirk FK1 3BQ.
(Telephone : Slamannan 282)

Thanking you in His name.

GIVE AS HE HAS GIVEN

WHAT would you do if the Lord took your contribution on Sunday and multiplied it by ten and made that your income for the week? How much would you make? Would you be satisfied with your salary? If you gave one dollar, and He gave you ten - if you gave five and He gave you fifty, would you be able to live on it for the week?

If the Lord prospered you as you gave, instead of asking you to give as you have been prospered, how would you fare? It makes us think of, and long for the return of that old sign seen in many places: "I had better start giving to God as He has given to me, lest He start giving to me as I have given to Him". From "THE LIGHT".

Weighed In The Balances and Found Wanting

Suppose the Lord were to summon you to be weighed by the standard of His word.

How would it go with you :-

If he weighed your influence?
 If he weighed your words?
 If he weighed your prayers?
 If he weighed your offerings?
 If he weighed your attendance at worship?
 If he weighed your efforts at soul-saving?
 If he weighed your efforts at Bible study?
 If he weighed your honesty?
 If he weighed your purity of living?
 If he weighed your forgiveness of others?
 How much would you weigh? Selected.

FIFTEEN NEVERS OF MARRIAGE

- 1 Never both be angry at once.
- 2 Never talk at one another, either alone or in company.
- 3 Never speak loud to each other unless the house is on fire.
- 4 Never find fault, unless it is perfectly certain that a fault has been committed, and always speak lovingly.
- 5 Never allow a request to be repeated.
- 6 Never make a remark at the expense of the other.
- 7 Never part for a day without loving words.
- 8 Never meet without loving welcome.
- 9 Never let the sun go down on any anger or grievance.
- 10 Never let any fault you have committed go by until you have frankly confessed it, and in sincere repentance asked forgiveness.
- 11 Never forget the happy hours of early love.
- 12 Never sigh over what might have been, but make the best of what is.
- 13 Never forget that marriage is ordained of God, and that His blessing alone can make it what it should be.
- 14 Never be contented until you know you both are walking in the Lord's way.
- 15 Never let your hopes stop short of the eternal home.

Making marriage work is like running a farm. You have to start all over again each morning.
 Millbrook Bulletin. From "The Truth"

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