

The SCRIPTURE STANDARD

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

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WHAT THINK YE?

Our thoughts are very important. Few of us can say that we do not have thoughts; indeed most of our waking hours are spent in thoughts of one kind or another. Nebuchadnezzar had troubled thoughts even as he lay in bed. Human thoughts can be morbid; sad; sombre; dark; brooding; malicious; resentful; envious; treacherous; suspicious; painful; malevolent; pernicious; baleful; mischievous; vile; nefarious; base; corrupt; depraved; wicked; vicious or can be bright; pleasant; generous; kind; pious; virtuous; benevolent; cheerful; healthful; genial; agreeable; hospitable; beautiful; gracious; happy; pure; friendly, or a mixture of these. Our thoughts have a great bearing on our lives and usually those "who think beautiful thoughts" have equally beautiful personalities. We can think the worst in every situation and 'thinking the worst' soon becomes a bad habit, and even an attitude to life. "Think beautiful thoughts" is good advice. Perhaps we feel that it is not within our compass to think beautiful thoughts, or any other kind for that matter; and that we have, in fact, *no control* over what we think - thoughts just come to us. Truly the devil tempts us with evil thoughts but the scriptures require that we should not entertain such thoughts but cast them behind us. When the thought came to Judas that he ought to betray Jesus he harboured the thought and eventually brought it to fruition; whereas he should have strangled it in its infancy.

Thoughts are vitally important because, as Solomon said, "As a man thinketh, in his heart, so is he" (Pr. 23:7). It is alarming to think that we can never be better than our thoughts. As a man thinks so is he. Our *actions begin* as thoughts. Expediency may be the *mother* of invention, but thought is the *father* of action. We worry about our actions and yet actions are firstly conceived in our thoughts. Indeed we never know what a person is thinking until their thoughts have found expression - either in words or in actions. The Chinese have a reputation for being 'Inscrutable' and we can never read their thoughts in their faces but this is essentially true of everyone. *Kind thoughts* will give expression to a *kind act*, and conversely, we can be sure that all evil deeds are cradled first in evil thoughts. Sometimes an evil thought remains, unconsummated, in the mind of man because of the fear of the consequences but *the thought* is as repugnant to God, as is the deed. One man may harbour a desire to injure, or even kill, his neighbour but refrain from doing so in fear of discovery, but the thought is as evil as the act. Thus, evil thoughts, quite apart from the absence of any accompanying action, are per se, under the condemnation of God. In the estimation made by Jesus "*Evil thoughts*" head the list of all the terrible things emanating from the human heart. He said, "For out of the heart proceed *evil thoughts*; murders;

adulteries; fornications; thefts; false witness; blasphemies." (Matt. 15:19). Evil deeds are condemned by Jesus but so are *evil thoughts*. Men say that we can't go to jail for what *we think*, but it seems that we might well end up in hell because of our thoughts.

God's Thoughts are Higher

Every now and then we should indulge in a little introspection and ponder the nature and the quality of the thoughts that we have. Jesus was continually taking the temperature of the thoughts of men. "What thinkest thou" He would ask. "Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts"? "How think ye" "Why do these thoughts arise in your hearts" (a good question). By probing the thoughts of men Jesus was able to demonstrate the vast gulf between God's thoughts and man's thoughts. After all, man is not known for being modest about the alleged high standard of his own thoughts. There is no shortage of men willing to commit their thoughts to print so that all the world may share their sagacity and marvel at their wisdom. Any bookstall will demonstrate this. It's not so long ago that Mao Tse-tung wearied the world in general, and the Chinese in particular, by printing the little red book - "The Thoughts Of Mao Tse-tung" and insisting that his thoughts be studied and memorised by all the many millions of Chinese and that excerpts be read over the radio every hour. We never hear of his 'thoughts' nowadays and he, and his thoughts, have gone the way of the world. To be offered the proverbial "Penny for our thoughts" is usually to be offered more than they are worth for Paul says that even the thoughts of those regarded by man as wise, are vain (1 Cor. 3:20). Paul went on to say that even if it was remotely possible to think of God as partly foolish His foolishness would be wiser than the wisest of men. The best of men are men at best. The Psalmist has much to say about man's thoughts but is as complimentary as he can be when he describes them as 'vain'. At best they are vain and at worst they are an abomination, and "God has no place in the thoughts of the wicked" (Ps. 10:4) Even prior to the Flood God discovered "that the wickedness of man was great upon the earth and that every imagination of the thoughts of man was only evil, continually."

Is it surprising, therefore, to note the words of Isaiah (55:7-11) "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the Lord; and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon."? Isaiah believes that just as wicked man can forsake his *way* and unrighteous man *can forsake his thoughts*. Isaiah would, therefore, seem to disagree that we are the victims of our thoughts and that we are held captive by them. He calls upon man *to ditch* his unrighteous thoughts. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts." Thus, Isaiah confirms that man can not only be 'wicked' in his 'ways' but also 'unrighteous' in his 'thoughts' and both equally are to be repented of. We notice too that in trying to quantify the disparity between God's ways and thoughts and man's ways and thoughts Isaiah finds the difference incalculable (i.e. the distance between heaven and earth) which, when we come to think of it, seems appropriate. The Psalmist uttered similar sentiments when he cried, "Many, O Lord, are Thy wonderful works which Thou hast done, and Thy thoughts which are to usward; they cannot be reckoned up in order unto Thee: if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered (Ps. 40:5).

"Behold I Thought"

What then, is the practical effect of this vast differential between God's thoughts and man's thoughts? Surely it must mean that we must at all times *be guided by God's holy scriptures*, and *not* by the recommendation of men, however well intentioned. We must, as Solomon put it, "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart and lean not unto thine own understanding". (Pr. 3:5). Notwithstanding these wise words, it seems that

'when the chips are down' that men seek out fellowmen (with a reputation for wisdom) and seek their guidance. (For some time I attended a Bible-Study where one lady used to conclude all discussion by saying, "Yes, that's what the Bible says but I must go and see what my Minister thinks".) To all intents and purposes God's thoughts and ways have been encapsulated in the New Testament and that is the document by which we shall be accused or excused. The apostle Paul (Rom. 2:15) refers, with obvious approval, to the fact that the Gentiles, notwithstanding that they did not have the Law (of Moses) nevertheless kept that Law, quite naturally, and their conscience and *their thoughts* either excused or accused them. This was highly admirable of course but today we have a written New Testament and our consciences and thoughts can be regulated by the words of Christ and His apostles. This same document, (says the writer to the Hebrews,) "is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." (Heb. 4:12). Thoughts enter our heads much like, I suppose, fish enter the seaman's net. Many of the fish in the net, upon close examination, are unsuitable and are thrown back into the sea. The Word of God is 'a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart' and so furnishes a divine measuring rod for our thoughts, whether they be wholesome or evil, whether virtuous or unrighteous. When Simon the Sorcerer offered to buy the supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit *the mere expression* of the wish brought the wrath of God upon his head. We are to suppose that had the thought not been given words, and Peter had not heard it, the wrath of God would still have focussed upon the thought, albeit unexpressed. Simon was advised 'to repent of his wickedness and pray to God that *the thought of his heart* might be forgiven him'. I fear that we all have unworthy thoughts from time to time and require the admonition given to Simon. The story is told of the small girl who was encouraged by her father to read a portion of the Bible every day. After a few weeks the child complained that she could not always retain what she read and indeed could scarcely remember what she had read a few days previously. Her father agreed about the difficulty of retaining what she read but insisted that it was still a good practice - even just for the cleansing of the mind. He sent her to fetch the potato basket and after emptying out the muddy potatoes told her to go and fill the basket with water. She returned several times to admit failure but was sent back again to the tap. After a while the father called a halt to the procedure and admitted that the basket would never be able to retain all the water, "But", said he, "Notice how much cleaner the basket is".

When Naaman the leper (2 Kings: 5) was instructed by Elisha, God's prophet, to "Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean" we find that his reaction to God's instructions was not untypical of similar reactions from mankind today. "But Naaman was wrath and he went away, and said, "Behold I thought.....". The instructions were not what he had expected. He had imagined that Elisha would have come out to see him (at the very least) and that he would have put his hand on the diseased parts of the body and uttered great prayers to his God. But no: nothing like that had happened - a mere servant had been sent with the cold and laconic message to go and dip seven times in the local river. As we know, Naaman's servants eventually calmed him down and suggested that if he had been asked to do some great thing, he would have done it - so why not do a simple thing. The incident ended happily with Naaman losing his dread disease as he emerged from the Jordan the seventh time. But surely Naaman's attitude is very common today. People come to God with predetermined notions of what they want to hear and when they discover that God wants them to believe and be baptised (immersed) - (Acts 2; Rom. 6 etc) - they often shrink back and say "This is not what I expected - "Behold I thought..." this or that. Indeed much of the trouble in the religious world is because more credence is given to our thoughts (what men think)

that what God says. "Behold I thought..." is a common reaction and if our thoughts (or the thoughts of 'our Minister') takes preference over God's thoughts, then *our thoughts* must be regarded as evil. After all, we cannot expect our thoughts to be in any way pre-emptive of God's thoughts, since His thoughts and ways are superior and so much higher.

Conclusion

Our thoughts are very important and they influence our lives. We have a certain control over them and must try to expunge all unworthy thoughts from our hearts and minds. Our thoughts must be *conditioned* by God's word and if, for example, we think to revenge ourselves upon someone for some act or word against us, the knowledge that "Vengeance belongeth to the Lord" will condition such a thought and hopefully evaporate it. In this connection there are at least two passages of scripture worthy of our notice, however brief:-

(1) 2 Cor 10:5 where Paul states that the weapons of our warfare are not weak "but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds. Casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and *bringing into captivity every thought* to the obedience of Christ". Paul reckons that our thoughts can be controlled i.e. "brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ." McKnight says of this verse, "The empty reasonings and foolish imaginations of the human mind being thrown down, every thought which arises in it, from that time forth, is made as subservient to the obedience of Christ, as slaves are to the will of their Lords. In this noble passage, the apostle with great energy describes the method in which wicked men fortify themselves against the gospel, raising as it were one barrier behind another, to obstruct its entrance into their minds. But when these are all thrown down, the gospel is received, and Christ is obeyed implicitly; *every thought and reasoning* taking its direction from him".

(2) The second passage, Phil. 4:8, suggests to us *the kind of thoughts* well pleasing to God. Once again the words come from the apostle Paul, as parting advice to the disciples at Philippi, "Finally brethren, whatsoever things are *true*, whatsoever things are *honest*, whatsoever things are *just*, whatsoever things are *pure*, whatsoever things are *lovely*, whatsoever things are of *good report*; if there be any *virtue*, and if there be any praise, *think on these things*." Clearly advice to "Think beautiful thoughts" is perfectly scriptural. "Think on these things", says Paul. Anything true; anything honest; anything just; anything pure; anything lovely; anything respectable (of good report); anything virtuous; anything praiseworthy - any of these are fit subjects to form the basis of our thoughts.

Think on *these things* - think beautiful thoughts.

EDITOR

HEAVEN

Heaven is the Home of the Soul — Rev. 22:1-8; 21:27; 2 Cor. 12:1-4.

Introduction: The heaven of the Bible is not an arbitrary place into which persons go after death; it is a place into which the righteous enter and are safe. It is adapted to the habits and character of the pure and good; of a well-conditioned soul, rendered so by the faith of the gospel, and a life of self-denial and sacrifice. It is a life of happiness, according to its measure, like that which God enjoys, who is holy, just and good, and therefore unspeakably happy.

It is a heaven of love. In it, there is nothing to disturb, to change or to alter the free and eternal exercise of this principle. It is the vital element of the immortal life of the saints. There is nothing there but what is lovely. No deception, no deceits, no mere professions.

Nothing that defiles, or works abomination, or makes a lie, shall enter there. Such are without; and therefore disgust, hatred, alienation, and the fruits of the flesh, can have no place in heaven. It excludes forever all that is unseemly and discordant; and instead, presents us all that is meant by the true, the beautiful and the good, to perfection and without any mixture. (Rev. 21:8)

What does God's Word say about this wonderful place?

First, let us consider the meaning and use of "Heaven" in the Bible:

(A) 'Heaven' occurs 496 times in the Bible; and the plural form occurs 145 times.
 (B) Heavens (plural) most usually refers to the aerial or the sidereal realms of the physical universe.

1 The area immediately surrounding the earth is the heaven where the birds fly, where clouds are.

(a) This God created on the second day (Gen. 1:6-8), called the "open firmament of heaven" (Gen. 1:20).

(b) Jesus alluded to it when He said, "the birds of the heaven" (Matt. 8:20).

2 Then there is the second heaven. This is called the "Sidereal" — which is the home of the stars, the sun and the moon.

(a) David referred to this when he said: "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handywork." (Psa. 19:1).

Psalm 19:1 — "Is-smewwiet ixandru l-glorja t'Alla; u l-firxa tas-sema turi l-egbmil idejh."

(b) Isaiah declared that God "stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain." (Isa 40:22).

Isa. 40:22 — "Hu jmidd is-smewwiet bhal purtiera."

(c) Peter says that "the heavens shall pass away with a great noise" (2 Pet. 3:10).

(d) And Jesus said, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away." (Matt. 24:35).

(e) As evidence that this heaven is the home of the stars, Jesus in describing the signs of His second coming declared that "the stars shall fall from heaven" (Matt. 24:29).

(C) Our present study however concerns Heaven where God's throne is. (Deut. 26:15; 1 Kings 8:30; Matt. 5:24-35).

(1) It is also the habitation of Christ. (Heb. 4:14; 9:24)

(2) And, it is the eternal home of the saved.

The 11th chapter of Hebrews is an outstanding chapter on the subject of faith. It mentions many persons of Old Testament days whose faith was indeed remarkable. There we read of Abraham who became the "father of all them that believe," of Noah who built the ark and preserved the race from the flood, and of Enoch who "walked with God: and he was not, for God took him."

Probably the most outstanding characteristic of the faith of anyone mentioned in this chapter is the fact that they considered themselves to be "strangers and pilgrims" upon this earth, and they looked as did Abraham for the city which 'hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

This earth was not designed for the spiritual home of the soul, but was adapted for the fleshly needs of the body, "the earthly". The fleshly body is sown in "corruption", and must put on "incorruption" before it is suited for the home of the soul. "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." Those great patriarchs, in turning their backs upon the offerings of this life, and seeking instead the city of God, recognized a simple truth regarding this fleshly existence that most of the wise and understanding of our own time have been unwilling to accept. All living here must die. About us we see the undeniable evidence of death, corruption, and decay. "It is appointed unto man once to die, and after death cometh the Judgment." (Heb. 9:27).

Faced with this truth, it is small wonder that men through the centuries have found consolation, strength, and faith in the Bible's assurance that a heavenly home awaits the faithful of God.

Heaven is as real and as sure as the inspiration of the Bible. The Bible undeniably teaches the reality of heaven, and urges men and women to *prepare themselves* to inherit it. It is the place where we shall "rest from our labours, (Rev. 14:13) where there will be no sighing, sorrow, or pain any more. (Rev 21:4) It is more to be desired than all the wealth of this world, and can best be described as a "mansion" prepared for the righteous. It is the place where the glory of God is the light, and where God's servants shall endlessly serve Him on and on.

HEAVEN — Our Home

Heaven is described as a home. The concept of heaven as a home is not one of our imagination. It is one of Bible origin. "We make it our aim," says the apostle Paul, "whether we be *at home* or absent, to be well pleasing unto him". (2 Cor. 5:9) Paul believed that taking leave of this mortal body meant to *go home to God*.

A great deal of time has been wasted trying to decide whether or not there will be degrees of bliss in heaven and degrees of punishment in hell. Some are very positive that there are degrees of enjoyment in heaven and of suffering in hell. There are some texts that seem to indicate this. However, when we discover that to go to heaven means to be with God, and to fail to go to heaven means to be banished from His presence forever, we have little concern about degrees. The one important thing is that we reach heaven.

In heaven everything that the soul may desire is included. That is the true concept of heaven. The Bible speaks of heaven as a place where we will eat of the tree of life and live forever, and sometimes, where we will "eat of hidden manna," (Rev. 2:17), as God's people one time feasted upon manna provided in the wilderness. Heaven will provide every need, and the thirst of the soul will be fully quenched. "For the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall lead them to the fountains of water of life, and God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes." (Rev. 7:17). We miss the true meaning altogether by trying to reduce heaven to degrees.

The Bible teaches that in that heavenly home there will be companionship with the redeemed of all ages. Not only shall we be with God, but in Matt. 8:11,12, we read, "They shall come from the north, east, south, and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God". Many of the sons of the kingdom — Jews who once thought they had the inside privileges — will be left without. People will be brought from every tribe, and nation, and tongue, and will have the privilege of sitting down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of God.

We think of a home as a place where righteousness is the rule of conduct, and this helps to remind us that "We look for a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness." (2 Pet. 3:13). The judgment will be in righteousness. There will not be any partiality shown. There will be no unrighteousness.

The home of the soul is a place of rest. Weary travellers always dream of home as a place of rest. Heaven, the home of the soul, is a place of rest to the soul of men. Our Lord in his great invitation promised this rest.

Heaven is a *prepared* place for those who have *prepared* for it. That preparation is the purpose of our preaching the gospel. That preparation begins with childlike faith which accepts the Lord as the Saviour of men. It begins by one's becoming a child of God, that is, by hearing the *one gospel* from the *one God* and come to the *one faith* in the *one Lord*, which when expressed in the *one baptism*, by being immersed in water, brings you into union with the *one body* through the *one spirit*, and creates within you the *one hope* for all eternity. This is God's ecumenical plan. No human tradition, no human creed, no human catechism can prepare one single soul to enter

heaven, to have eternal life. The apostle John in his gospel tells us that "these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name." (20:31). The apostle Paul tells us in his letter to the Romans, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation..." 1:16. The Bible closes with a warning that "if any one adds to it, God will add to him the plagues described in the book, and if any one takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are written in this book." (Rev. 22:1-19).

With all these serious warnings and admonitions people still do not listen and continue to walk according to the traditions of men. The scripture, "If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" (1 Pet. 4:18) is a challenge to you and to me to make intensive preparation. Perhaps, these few comments I have written may cause readers to have some idea of what it will be to be in heaven, and may the Lord bless this message to the good of our soul and may He bring us all at last into that Happy Land.

GEORGE EBEJER, Cospicua, Malta.

GLEANINGS

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

HIS GRACE SUFFICIENT

"Sufficient" - the grace of Christ is always and evermore sufficient. See that noble, rolling river; it has been flowing for thousands of years, watering the fields, and slaking the thirst of a hundred generations; yet it shows no sign of exhaustion. See the morning sun as he shoots his golden arrows high above the mountain crests, and as he gilds the curtains of the dawn with a glittering glory: he has been performing this daily miracle for millenniums; he has melted the snows of six thousand winters, and renewed the verdure of as many summers; yet he shines as gloriously as ever; his eye is not dimmed, and his natural strength is unabated. Gaze out across the heaving bosom of the ocean, greater than all the earth's rivers in one: for ages it has rolled its tides around the globe and washed the shores of the five continents; yet its mighty volumes are as deep and full as ever; its tossing tides rush in, as fresh and exhilarating as in the days of the race's infancy. Do not these things try to speak to us of the grace of Christ? In Him are fountains that never run dry, and rivers that never cease their flowing. He is a sun that never languishes, and an ocean ever full. Certainly indeed is His grace "sufficient" for us. His "sufficiency" is simply the expression toward us of His infinite fulness."

J. Sidlow Baxter

PATIENCE

'An Alpine tourist set out at early morning to climb the Matterhorn. The air was bracing, and he pressed on with springing steps. Presently he passed a peasant going on with steady strides, and to himself he said, 'Slow fellows these, hereabouts,' and on he hastened. But the path was steep and rugged. Ere noon his steps lagged, and he reclined to rest under an overhanging crag. Then along came the peasant with that steady, swinging gait, and passed on before him. It is but another version of the hare and the tortoise, a lesson which holds true in spiritual as in secular life. It pays to be patient. It pays to plod. Faith is our alpenstock, beloved. Let us lean hard upon it.'

Dr. D. J. Burrell

SELF CONTROL

"When Horace Greely went to New York to seek his fortune, his uncouth appearance called down the ridicule of many and sometimes the persecution of his fellow-

labourers in the printing office. Under the most exasperating treatment he always kept his patience, and exhibited in return a generous spirit. These elements with his skill won for him the respect of every discerning one. He that ruleth his own spirit is better than he that taketh a city."

GOD'S GOLD

"Why dread thou hunger, why fear thou cold
When filled is the world with God's own gold
The buttercup's gold as it floods the fields
To a thousand hearts its treasurers yields;
The clouds in the west that seek to borrow
Day's vanishing gold, the hope of the morrow,
The golden sunshine that lives in the sky,
The glittering stars that gleam on high;
And oceans of gold rise, swell, and fall
In billows of grain, in the song-bird's call;
The golden heart that never will fail,
The golden spirit that never will quail.
Why fetter the soul in search for gold,
When close at thy feet lie treasures untold?"

Ella Walton.

"THE UPSETTING' SIN"

"A negro one night at a prayer-meeting earnestly prayed that he and his brethren might be preserved from what he called their "upsettin' sin".

"Brudder", one of the friends said, you ain't got the hang of dat ar word.

"It's 'besettin', not 'upsettin'."

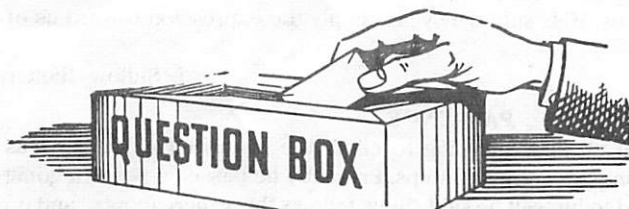
"Brudder", replied he, "if dat's so, it's so; but I was prayin' de Lord to save us from the sin of 'toxication, an' if dat ain't a upsettin' sin I dunno what am".

Sure enough, the old negro was right; drunkenness is the upsettin' sin, upsetting homes and characters."

WE QUOTE - RUSKIN

"Love, I think, chiefly grows in giving: only in proportion as we draw near to God and are made in a manner like unto Him, can we increase this our possession of Charity of which the entire essence is God's only."

SELECTED BY LEONARD MORGAN.



Conducted by
Alf Marsden

"Speaking to a person who has never been much interested in Christianity what would you say are the advantages, if any, of living a Christian life?"

To people who live their lives bounded by earthly pursuits and pleasures, the Christian life by comparison must seem dull and dismal in the extreme. The philosophy of 'eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow you die' is deeply etched onto our present-day society, and because people see no validity in Christian living they tend to look upon Christianity as a deprivation from all things pleasurable; to the Christian, nothing could be further from the truth. How does *he* see his life?

A Life of Privileges

Contrary to what people in a sin-orientated world might believe when they look around and view the world scene, God is a God of mercy. It is not His intention that masses of people should be dying in the continent of Africa, and in many other places, because of lack of food. The unthinking are apt to say, "If there is a God, He should never allow this", but they forget that God has provided resources out of His providential hand which would feed the populations of the world many times over; is it that the love and mercy of God are doubted because greedy and avaricious people accumulate unto *themselves* the things which flow from the bounty of God? Or is it that it is more convenient to blame God whom they cannot see and for whom, seemingly, they have no respect? We are indebted to the Apostle Peter for revealing to us the great privileges which God has provided for those who are courageous enough to live the Christian life.

God's mercy has devised a great salvation. The Bible teaches us that every person is a sinner, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God", says Paul (Rom. 3:23). The same Apostle said, "The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:23). Sin separates us eternally from God, but God will give us, if we will accept it, eternal life through His Son Jesus, the Christ. Peter, out of the fulness of his heart, writes, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Pet. 1:3). Thus, says Peter, if we live the Christian life our salvation is secured by Christ's resurrection. But your salvation *must* be by Christ Jesus because the same Peter says, "Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

This great salvation guarantees, according to Peter, "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you". What a great privilege is unfolded to us. We who are accustomed to living in a world which is full of corruption cannot conceive of an incorruptible inheritance in heaven, but God promises that it will be so for the person who is willing to live the overcoming life. Even while the Christian waits for this future bliss, he contemplates the Saviour who procured it for him, and can echo the words of Peter, "Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory; receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls" (v8). A wonderful Saviour is Jesus our Lord.

This great salvation is a mighty privilege for us today. Peter tells us that the prophets of old desired to know what they were prophesying; he then goes on, "Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into" (v12). Just think of it; down through the ages, through the mouths of the holy prophets, the Good News concerning Christ has come down to us today. Furthermore, the *angels* desire to look into this. Is the Christian life a life of privilege? It most certainly is.

A Life of Duty

The Christian life teaches us that we must be holy because He who saved us is holy. Before he dies to take up his glorious inheritance, the Christian must live his life here on earth as a pilgrim. He must so live that he does not bring discredit to the name of the One who saved him. He must be ever mindful of what his redemption cost in terms of the sacrifice of his Saviour.

The Christian, while here upon earth, lives as a citizen of a country along with other fellow-citizens. He is taught to be loyal and obedient to the authorities. He must not knowingly do anything which will cause harm or distress to his fellow-men. In his

work he should be conscientious and dedicated; he lives as a Christian and he should therefore work as a Christian.

As regards marriage, husbands and wives have mutual duties and responsibilities. Husbands should love their wives as Christ loved the Church. Wives should see to it that they reverence their husbands. Husbands and wives who are living the Christian life should at all times and in all circumstances be supportive of each other. They should be a living example in the community in which they live as to how Christians conduct themselves in marriage. If ever the world needed an example like that it is surely now.

A Life of Suffering

To many, in Apostolic times, to live a life as a Christian was to live a life of suffering; this may still be so today if Christians live under a hostile regime. Even if there is no open hostility, to live a Christian life is to leave oneself open to abuse, ridicule, and in some cases physical abuse because of the adherence to Christian principles in a work situation is anathema to fellow-workmen who see no point in working to such principles and, indeed, work actively *against* such principles. There is no doubt at all in my mind that on many occasions Christians suffer because of these and other ways in which people react against them. There may be some who will say, "Well, is it worth it?" My answer is, "Of course it is worth it, providing that the Christian at all times realises that he is suffering for righteousness sake. He is suffering as a Christian, and in that fact he can rejoice.

Why is it, then, that the Christian can rejoice in suffering, and what can the world learn from it? To my mind, the cardinal point to realise is that to suffer as a Christian is to be a partaker in the suffering of his Master. Why is this important both to the Christian and to the world? Well simply because it was through the suffering of Christ that salvation came to the world, and it may very well be that suffering as a Christian, and trying, to some extent, to mirror the suffering of Jesus may conceivably lead someone to seek salvation in Him, and that is *always* an occasion for rejoicing.

Furthermore, as the Christian lives his life he is always conscious of the need to refine his life through the Holy Spirit. He must grow into maturity; his life must be so disciplined that he no longer thinks or acts like a child. How refreshing this is in a world where tantrums and peevishness are the normal reactions of many people. If the world needs anything now, it is maturity and discipline. Obedience is a word which is rapidly dropping out of our vocabulary; the clergy are even willing to omit it from the marriage ceremony. But obedience is at the grassroots of Christian living, and without it a true relationship with God cannot exist. We must seriously question a society which accepts indiscipline and immaturity, and which is constantly seeking the good of self even to the detriment of the good of others. If God and Christ were like that then there would be no salvation, indeed, the world would not be a fit place in which to live.

The questioner asks, "Are there advantages in Christian living". The answer is an unqualified 'yes', but don't just take my word for it, get on the inside yourself and then you won't need to ask the question, you will know. May God grant you the courage to do this, for His sake.

(All questions, please to Alf Marsden, 377 Billinge Road, Hayfield, Wigan, Lancs.)

ONLY one principle will give you courage — that is the principle that no evil lasts forever, nor indeed for very long.

IT isn't possessions that condemn a man, but how he obtained them and the use he makes of them.

ADOPTION

Romans 8:15 — “For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of ADOPTION by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father.’”

Romans 8:23 — “And not only they, but we also who have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the ADOPTION, the redemption of our body.”

Romans 9:4 — “...who are the Israelites, to whom pertain the ADOPTION, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises...”

Galations 4:4-5 — “But when the fulness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the ADOPTION as sons.”

Ephesians 1:5 — “...having predestined us to ADOPTION as sons by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will...”

The Greek word for ADOPTION is HUIOTHESIA from HUIOS, a son, and THESIS, a placing, and signifies the place and condition of a son given to one to whom it does not naturally belong. The word is used by the Apostle Paul only.

“ADOPTION — We find that it was a term used in Roman legal practice. It referred to a legal action by which a person takes into his family a child not his own, with the purpose of treating him as and giving him all the privileges of an own son. The custom was not common among the Jews but was so among the Romans, with whom an adopted child is legally entitled to all rights and privileges of a natural born child.

KENNETH S. WURST

“There was no more dramatic and far-reaching legal ceremony in any law than Roman adoption. The seriousness and the finality of Roman adoption was due to the fact of the Roman PATRIA POTESTAS, the law of the father’s power. Under Roman law a Roman father had absolute power over his children (In adoption) the child had to pass from one PATRIA POTESTAS to another. It was carried out by a symbolic sale; the process was called MANCIPIATIO. Scales and copper weights were used. Twice the father sold his son, and twice he bought him back again. Then he sold him for a third and last time, and the sale was complete. After that, the three parties, the adopted son, his father, and the adopter, all appeared before the Roman magistrate called the PRAETOR, and a symbolic lawsuit was carried out, in which the legal claim for the son to be brought into the new PATRIA POTESTAS was fully argued, and only when that case was settled was adoption complete The consequences of Roman adoption were far-reaching. The adopted son completely lost all rights in his old family and completely gained all rights in his new family. In the most literal sense he gained a new father. He became as fully heir to his new father’s estate as any normal son. According to the law all the debts and obligations of his former life were cancelled. He was a new person entering upon a new life. If the adopted person had children of his own, as he well might have, these children also became the children of the adopting father. The family was affected by the adoption just as much as the father was. In Roman law, the adopted person became in the most literal sense the child of the adopting father..... It was this that Paul was thinking when he spoke of the adoption of the Christian into the family of God. The Christian received a new father - even God... All his past life was cancelled and there was given to him a new beginning and a new start, clean from the cancelled sins of the past. He became a full inheritor of the grace and the wealth of the riches of God. He became the kinsman of all the saints of God.”

WILLIAM BARCLAY

"Adoption involved the transfer of a person from the absolute control of his whole life by one man to the absolute control of his life by another. There had to be a complete surrender of the power of life and death by one and a complete assumption of that power by another. So drastic was this change that the one who was transferred to another PATRIA POTESTAS, was looked upon as a wholly new creature. He was said to be born again, or born anew. A whole new existence for him began on the day that the transfer of allegiance was ratified. Never again would he be subject in any sense to his former relationship. It was as if he had literally died to his past."

W. CARL KETCHERSIDE

"Sin, then, condemns, pollutes, alienates, and destroys its subjects. Grace justifies, sanctifies, ADOPTS, and saves its subjects in reference to these points. Pardon has respect to guilt; justification, to condemnation; sanctification, to pollution; ADOPTION, to alienation; and salvation, to destruction. Those out of Christ are, then, in their sins, condemned, unholy, alien, and lost; while those in Christ are pardoned, justified, sanctified, ADOPTED into the family of God, and saved."

ALEXANDER CAMPBELL From: "Sound In Faith"

"MY THOUGHTS ARE NOT YOUR THOUGHTS"

It would be good for all of us, Christian or non-Christian to realize that our concept of God's word, His intention and purpose, is not necessarily *God's* own concept. How unworthy and unwilling we are to respond to the pleadings of this merciful and longsuffering God, as is written: "Incline your ear, and... come unto me; hear and your soul shall live" (Isaiah 55:3). "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, are thoughts of peace, and not of evil to give you an expected end. Ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:11-13).

Indeed, the thoughts of God towards us are merciful, *loving* and *longsuffering*, and despite man's imperfect concept of God, He says: "Come now and let us reason together, saith the Lord, though your sins be as scarlet they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isaiah 1:18).

The parable of the Prodigal son in Luke 15:11-24 epitomizes our position. The love of the boy's father, is like that of God. With a comfortable home, having all of the best, lacking nothing as far as worldly goods were concerned, he considered himself able and capable to leave home, believing he could fend for himself. In broad principle, this is what man has done with God. Through sin, and a false sense of independence, man, like Israel, (despite the pleadings and admonitions of God through the prophets) has gone his own way. To go our own way is, in effect to *go astray*. God's ways are higher and better than our ways.

Our own way takes us away from God. But you will notice *when everything went wrong* with the Prodigal Son, he "came to himself". Having realized his mistake and his unworthiness, he became fully convicted and penitent and decided to return home. In response to *his ready admission of error* he was welcomed back into the home and there was great rejoicing. The story is ageless and is constantly repeated, every day, in some family or other. It is also oft repeated in the spiritual world. Sooner, or later, we must acknowledge the ways of God and concede that His ways *are paramount*. Like the prodigal's father, God is willing; indeed waiting, to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness, through the blood of Christ" (1 John 1:8-9), (by and through our obedience to the gospel of Christ, and what it demands.)

Yes, we must be once and for all willing to see clearly, humbly and sincerely that OUR ways and thoughts are not God's ways and thoughts, because His ways reach far above our imagination and finite minds. Let US then make the decision and accept the

Challenge of believing God's message of love (Romans 10:17) repenting of our sins (Acts 17:30) confessing Christ as the Son of God (Romans 10:9-10), and then to be baptized into Christ for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38).

Then, and only then, will there be rejoicing amongst the very angels of heaven over the sinner that repenteth. Mans' ways have been tried and have failed. How willing and humble are you - Non-Christian (and Christian alike) to thoroughly examine your thoughts, and your ways, to see whether they be in harmony with God's authoritative will? Or are we still at the stage of believing that our ways are better than God's ways. Are we like the Prodigal Son *before* he "came to himself" and have that lesson yet to learn? God's ways *really* are better than mans'.

Thos. W. Hartle, (Evangelist) Cape Town, R.S.A.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

JANUARY 1985

6—Prov. 24:1-22	Matt. 5:27-46
13—Dan. 6:1-16	Matt. 6:1-18
20—1 Kings 4:21-34	Matt. 6:19-34
27—Proverbs 9	Matt. 7:1-14

TEACHING WITH AUTHORITY

WE read this month a major portion of the "Sermon on the Mount". Matthew has collected together by divine inspiration essence (see last month's comments) of the Saviour's revolutionary instruction for human behaviour. "The Good News Bible" has paraphrased the passage concisely as follows - Teaching about Anger, Adultery, Divorce, Vows, Revenge, Love for enemies, Charity, Prayer, Fasting, Riches in Heaven, Light of the Body, Possessions, Judging Others, Asking, Seeking and Knocking in prayer, and the Narrow Way (to real life). Note the coverage in this peerless body of eloquent teaching of all human behaviour in normal life and religious practice. We may best with the space we have make selection of a few connected and related thoughts.

CONTRASTS WITH THE PAST

Here we see commandments with divine authority developed to their proper extent. Cancel out the unkind thought and murder is "out". The sin is in the heart. The danger of Judgement, the guilt in God's pure sight is as great as the bloodshed. So it is with adultery, with divorce, and with swearing. How easily

do the extra words, indicating unkind excitement of feeling, flow from the tongue (James 3:1-5). Exact balance in justice makes its demands but how much better is forgiveness. Hatred of evil is right, but the law of love, the NEW commandment is clearly enunciated. The demand upon God to punish sinners is to be given up in favour of His equal treatment in providence for all alike.

RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES

We have to bear in mind that the Jews had throughout their history regarded the outward profession of acts of worship as most important to such an extent that their sacrifices intended to please God became worse than distasteful to Him. They made them even with lame and sick animals. Likewise also in the instruction relating to giving, which was a public act in the Treasury, with its trumpet shaped money boxes (Mal. 1:13). Specially made robes, with tassels indicating special respect for the law, were worn not only by priests and officials of the Temple services, but also by rabbis and the sect of the Pharisees. Officials of the apostate churches of the past and present times make a show with their garments, and processions. Our danger today is more of being too shy of our profession than too pretentious. The instructions of the Saviour however stand just as strictly against doing things for show and to seek praise of men. We can be as wrong in making our singing pretentious as in having expensive instrumental accompaniment. Here is the Saviour's emphasis on our consciousness of God's watchful eye upon our inward feelings for we can even be deceiving ourselves.

The mere attendance at meetings can become a sham. We appear in no danger of the rule relating to fasting but we can discipline ourselves in eating and drinking and take pride in it for show. Prayer seems to need special notice for the constant repetition of the words here recorded has become the classic example of formal worship. This surely does not mean that the prayer may not be used constantly as the thoughts expressed must be right for any Christ-loving person, conscious of the many related truths and the absolute need for serious thoughtful attitude. "Prayer is the soul's sincere desire uttered or unexpressed, the motion of a hidden fire that trembles in the breast" (Christian Hymns 435). Anywhere - anytime, but on the knees in the closed room quite frequently.

EARTHLY AND HEAVENLY RICHES

Jesus is plainly teaching us not to put our minds into constant anxiety about our possessions. How easily they do become a chief concern. The Christian can never properly allow this. There is no doubt we ought to earn our living (2 Thess. 3:10) but not to gather possessions as an ambition - or give that a priority. Perhaps our advice is in Proverbs 30:8 & 9. "Take no thought" is not an up-to-date rendering - "do not be anxious" is better, but we ought not to water down the warning. We fear professing Christians are often at fault in this matter, and cause the heathen to blaspheme the holy name - not excluding myself. These are difficult days for many and yet in our country at least we are incomparably "safer" materially than the folk to whom Jesus spoke these words. How graphically He compares the superlative riches of Solomon with *ONE WEED FLOWER*. All Solomon's acquired treasures, against the priceless beauty of *ONE* created flower. Does this convey to us what Jesus intends us to understand that God cares for us - unworthy sinners that we are - the most conceited of us? We certainly ought to trust - "We are unprofitable servants" - not one of us has ever done completely what we OUGHT to have done, let alone anything extra to please

Him - "Who pleased not HIMSELF". I suppose that when Jesus speaks of the "light of the body" He is referring to the light of conscience and intelligence through which we learn what we ought to do; capacities which we are given by Him. We can neglect them as so many do and be in the outer darkness ultimately. We are tied to material things for such a fate. Finally we are told to give priority to the kingdom He came to establish - His church here upon earth obedient to the KING, Jesus HIMSELF IN HEAVEN. When He has the priority all else will fall into place, here and eternally.

FAULT FINDING

This is perhaps our commonest fault - discovering and finding the mistakes that others make. Do we get a comfort (false of course) in finding that others like ourselves are sinners and need correction? We are well warned of the mistake in doing it. The unkindness we exhibit if we allow ourselves the privilege will come back upon ourselves. So, not just for that reason, but because we look to our heavenly Father's forgiveness ourselves - avoid it like the plague. If the motive power in life is love for one another it will be easy. Finally for all we have received in instruction there must be the looking to our heavenly Father for all our spiritual help with the assurance that this will be available, but it will not be just "Falling into our lap". Effort will be needed, real application to a task. "Agonise to enter by the narrow door" (Luke 13:24).

R. B. SCOTT

A SYNECDOCHE

A synecdoche is a noun used as a figure of speech that is part of a whole.

Grace and faith are often used in the Bible in such a way.

Those that use the term saved by grace only or faith only violate the Scriptures. As an example, take Ephesians 2:8 that says "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that is not of yourselves: it is the gift of God". Grace and faith both are used as a synecdoche in this passage;

both are a part of the whole, the whole being the *gospel*.

I Corinthians 15:1-4 states that we are saved by the gospel, and Romans 1:16 says that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation. The *gospel* is the whole, but *grace* and *faith* are used as synecdoches, that is as part of the gospel.

With this understanding we cannot use Ephesians 2:8-9 and say that we are saved by *grace only* or by *faith only*. No passage teach *faith* or *grace* only. Jesus is the author of salvation to those that obey Him, Hebrews 5:8-9.

T. W. PHILLIPS II

P.O. Box 67, Rosemead, CA 91770 U.S.A.

NEWS FROM THE CHURCHES

Kentish Town: Anniversary, Saturday, October 6th. We warmly appreciated the presence of a goodly company of brethren and sisters from near and far, and enjoyed the ministrations of Bro. Ian Davidson from Motherwell. Bro. Derek Daniell chaired the afternoon and Bro. John Hunt the evening meeting. The time of praise, prayer and encouragement did good to us all, and we look to God for further blessing in His service. Bro. Davidson served us on Lord's Day also in exhortation and earnest gospel appeal.

R. B. SCOTT

Peterhead, Scotland: So many things have happened since our last report that space will not permit the inclusion of all the activities which have thrilled us during the year. So many memories of Campaign, The Peterhead Social Weekend; The Harding Chorus; The Camp at Stirling; Visits to Youth Week-ends and the general excitement of the local work come flooding back, suffice to say that the congregation here is growing in love, faith and hope, and the gospel is sounding out privately and publicly. We have had additions to the Body all the way through the year, and we are encouraged to see these saints growing like Jesus.

Our new brethren are Carol & Tom Youngson, Jack Youngson, Liz Anne Gatt, Jess Thrussell, Thomas Youngson, Jeanette Gilmartin, Kirstin Fox, Rena Emslie, Beldy Reed, Michael Youngson, Ian Genter, Anthony Whittam. We solicit your prayers for these our beloved brethren, and also for those who are coming under the gospel message every week. The saints here continue to be a source of blessing and encouragement to us and we thank our Father that we can be in such a place at such a time, for such a reason. We greet all the saints.

Michael Gaunt, Evangelist.

OBITUARY

Hindley: Brother Arthur Hood fell asleep in Jesus on the 29th of September in the Wigan Hospice after previously undergoing an operation in Wigan Infirmary.

The Lord has blessed him with a long life of 94 years, the doctor even suggested that he might reach 100. This however was not to be, and we are the poorer for his passing. Lately we had seen a change in his bearing, a stooping of the shoulders and a stagger in his walk. This did not deter him from attending meetings. His love of Jesus and His Word were the prominent feature of his mind and heart.

Though we shall miss him, we have the assurance that the Lord who is faithful will reward all his servants according to their trust and service to Him.

TOM KEMP

Peterhead, Scotland: Sister Joanne May, who became a servant of Jesus in Peterhead, in 1954, left this scene of time to be with her Lord on Monday 15th October. Joanne had lived in Australia for the past 13 years, but is remembered with affection by the saints here. A short service was held in her memory on Sunday October 21st, at which Bro. Jim Bowie spoke of our sister's example of faithfulness. We commend her family to the God of all comfort.

M. GAUNT

AID TO INDIA FUND

Just a brief report to those who have been sending donations to assist our less-better-off brethren in India.

In keeping with the total in our fund fairly modest amounts of cash aid have been sent to the following:-

- (1) To Paul Suban for the promotion of the hospital in which he is interested.
- (2) To Chukka Isaac; also to his son David to help with expenses of evangelistic work, tracts etc.
- (3) To Asgar Ali, Lahore, N. Pakistan to help with his work in the gospel.
- (4) To Bro. Masih, Lucknow, ill with heart trouble, and still trying to further gospel.
- (5) To A. Sundarraj for Childrens' Home at Chitoor.

The cause of brethren in need in Africa has also come to our notice. All gifts and contributions to the fund are gratefully received not only by me but especially the recipients - those in need. Please send all help, as before, to Ruth Nisbet, 1F Station Court, Haddington, East Lothian, Scotland.

FOR all your days prepare, and meet them ever alike. When you are the anvil, bear-when you are the hammer, strike!

TRIP TO HOLY LAND

Michael Gaunt is planning a trip to the Holy Land in the Autumn of 1985 (D.V.) The cost will be in the region of £450 and will be for approx. 10 days. If interested please contact M. Gaunt, 23 St Mary Street, Peterhead, Scotland.

SOME PEOPLE WHO ARE HARD TO UNDERSTAND

Those who serve the devil all week and then appear so pretentious and pious on the Lord's Day.

Those who absent themselves from the services of the church for days and weeks at a time and then come back, feeling they have done nothing wrong.

Those who believe they are going to heaven by attending only one service a week. Suppose they fed their body only once a week?

Those members of the church who expect their children to be faithful when they are unfaithful.

Those who become offended at the one who urges them to do the things the Lord commands.

Those who know they are not doing the will of the Lord, yet appear to feel so secure in their disobedience.

Bible Talk

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