

The SCRIPTURE STANDARD

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

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May 1995 be a Year of Blessing for all our Readers

God Bless Thy Year
Thy Coming In, Thy Going Out:
Thy Rest, Thy Travelling About:
The Rough, The Smooth,
The Bright The Drear,
God bless Thy Year

FROM HEAVEN: OR FROM MEN?

In last month's article, in response to the high level of misinformation created by many tract writers, I showed that in every case of conversion in the N.T. all converts were required not only to believe in Christ, but also to repent and be immersed for the remission of their sins. From past experience I know that the "only believe" tract-writers will largely ignore this evidence and continue regardless. Obviously they can't deny the contents of the Acts of the Apostles, but nevertheless they will act as if it was not there, and continue with their cry of "only believe." Before leaving this subject I would, however, once again, like to stress the great importance of baptism, and look at it from another point of view. I ask readers to consider **when** baptism was introduced into the world, **by whom** it was introduced and **why** it was introduced, and then honestly ask themselves if they can afford to ignore it.

The scriptures tell us that baptism was introduced into the world in the time of John the Immerser, and that it was introduced by God, and was for the remission of sins. There are those who would challenge this statement and who would allege that the baptism of John was not newly introduced but was merely a continuation of Jewish washings and that, in fact, proselytes to the Jewish faith had always been immersed, *long before John*. (In the Campbell-Rice Debate on baptism, in the USA about a hundred years ago, Alexander Campbell was presented with this challenge but strongly refuted it.) I asked a Jewish Rabbi, a few weeks ago, as to *why* proselytes (converts to the Jewish faith) were immersed and *when* the practice began. He said he had no idea but added that the reason was "certainly not for remission of sins or any nonsense like that."

Several scholars have, however, researched the question. MEYER says, "the baptism of John has erroneously been regarded as a modified application of the Jewish baptism of proselytes. For the baptism of proselytes, the oldest testimony to which occurs in the *Gemera Babyl. Jebamoth* 46:2, and regarding which Philo, Josephus and the more ancient Targumists are altogether silent, did not arise until after the fall of Jerusalem." (*Comm. On Matt. 3:5, p77*) GODET says, "The rite of baptism which consisted in the plunging of the body more or less completely into water, was not, at this period in use amongst the Jews, nor for proselytes from paganism, to whom, according to the testimony of history, baptism was not applied until after the fall of Jerusalem." (*Comm. On Luke 3:3.*) STUART says, "In fine we are destitute of any early testimony to the practice of proselyte baptism antecedently to the Christian era. The original institution of admitting Jews to the covenant, and strangers to the same, prescribed no other rite than circumcision. No account of any other is found in the O.T.; none in the Apocrypha, in the N.T., or Targums of Onkelos, Jonathon, Joseph the Blind, or in the work of any other Targumist except Pseudo-Jonathon whose work belongs to the 7th and 8th Century. No evidence is found in Philo, Josephus or any of the earlier Christian writers. How could any allusion to such a rite have escaped them all, if it were as common, and as much required, by usage as circumcision." (*Mode of Christian Baptism. p.140*) Space prevents similar quotations from other Bible Scholars who have likewise found no evidence whatsoever to support the claim that the baptism of proselytes stems from the O.T., or was in operation *prior* to the events recorded in the N.T. Perhaps we can squeeze in just one more: from ENCYCLOPAEDIA BRITANNICA: "The connection between the baptism of John and the Jewish baptism of proselytes, of which a great deal has been made, is founded on assumptions which cannot be proved. This very plausible theory first assumes that proselytes were baptised from an early time in the Jewish church, although the O.T. tells us nothing about it, and then supposes that John simply made use of this ordinary Jewish rite ... But the subject of the baptism of proselytes is one of the most hopelessly obscure in the whole round of Jewish antiquities and can never be safely assumed in any argument: and the general results of investigation seem to prove that the baptism of proselytes was not one of the Jewish ceremonies until long after the coming of Christ, while there is much to suggest that this Jewish rite owes its origin to Christian baptism." (Article on *Baptism* Vol. 3 p.348.)

From all this we can see that there is no substance to the allegation that John's baptism was merely a continuation of the Jewish practice of immersing proselytes, but rather the reverse: that current Jewish practice is copied from John's baptism and did not begin until well after the fall of Jerusalem, which was in 70 A.D. Now that that is out of the way, we can, perhaps, look at the true origin of baptism.

BAPTISM CAME FROM GOD

Regardless of the above, (i.e. the baptism of proselytes) the N.T. tells us that *it was God* who sent John into the world to baptise with the baptism of repentance. Baptism was something new and unique. "There was a man sent from God whose name was John" (John 1:6). John himself, said, "God sent me to BAPTISE with water . . ." (John 1:33), and John's coming was, of course, in fulfilment of prophecy (Is. 40:3 & Mal. 3:1 etc.).

John did not preach in air-conditioned auditoriums with plush seats, but he was to be found only in the deserts and the wilderness. Nor did he seek the people: the people sought him. Indeed they tramped vast distances to hear him and to queue up in their thousands to receive baptism. "Then went out to him Jerusalem: and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan and were baptised of him in Jordan, confessing their sins." (Matt. 3:5). If, in our imagination, we were to try and estimate the adult population of the city of Jerusalem, and add that figure to the population of Judea

and the region of the Jordan, we must, at a conservative estimate, be thinking in terms of hundreds of thousands. These thousands considered it important to search through the wilderness over many miles to find John and to be immersed by him in the Jordan. Why this enthusiasm? When we remember that the Jews had, for centuries, been obliged to vainly seek forgiveness of sins in the perpetual shedding of blood, with animal sacrifices, we can, perhaps, begin to understand their ecstatic joy on learning that such forgiveness could now be obtained at the mere cost, to them, of being immersed by John. Thus there was excitement *then* albeit it is missing today.

Amongst the many thousands who took John's baptism seriously, was Jesus, Himself. Aged 30 years, Jesus walked about 70 miles "to be baptised of John." Many today would not walk 70 yards for baptism, let alone 70 miles. "Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John to be baptised of him. But John forbade him saying, I have need to be baptised of thee, and comest thou to me? And Jesus answering said, Suffer it to be so now, FOR THUS IT BECOMETH US TO FULFIL ALL RIGHTEOUSNESS. Then suffered he Him." Although John's baptism was for the remission of sins, it was also a *holy ordinance of God*. Thus, although Jesus was without sin, He nevertheless insisted upon being baptised so that He might in all things obey the will of God: i.e. "fulfil all righteousness." And Jesus when He was baptised went up straightaway out of the water: and lo, the heavens were opened unto Him and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting upon Him. And lo, a voice from heaven, saying, This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." (Matt. 3:16). And so God, looking down approved of what had just been done: i.e. of Christ's obedience in baptism.

SUBTLE ANSWER TO A SIMPLE QUESTION

In one of the many confrontations Jesus had with the religious leaders, He was asked to explain *His source of authority* to speak on religious matters (Luke 20). Jesus assured the Pharisees that He would gladly answer this question if they would answer His question. His question, strangely enough, *involved baptism*. His question seemed simple enough: i.e. "The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or from men?" (We might ask the same question today: "The baptism of Christ, is it from heaven?"). The answer should have been easy had not these clergymen been crafty and dishonest. "And they reasoned within themselves, saying, if we shall say, From heaven: He will say, Why then ye believed him not? But if we say, Of men: all the people will stone us, for they be persuaded that John was a prophet. And they answered that they could not tell whence it was." We can imagine the disgust with which Jesus listened to this political but pathetic answer. "And Jesus said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things."

Jesus, as He often did, easily put those aggressive Pharisees on to the horns of a religious dilemma. It is interesting that He chose the question of *baptism* and that fact should tell us that Jesus acknowledged it as having come from God. Those Pharisees would have loved to have denied its heavenly origin but could not. If we, today, are persuaded that Christ's baptism has come from heaven, yet notwithstanding we avoid it; evade it; ignore it; dismiss it; circumvent it; explain it away or close our intelligence to it; can we then claim that we have an honest faith in Christ, or that we respect His word? And can we say that "We have fulfilled all righteousness?" We are, in effect, amongst the ranks of the Pharisees who confronted Jesus that day. Is it from heaven? If yes, how can we possibly reject it?

But there is more. In Luke 7:29 Jesus, in extolling the excellence of John as a prophet, reflects upon the reception that the people have given him (John). "And all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptised with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptised of him." How did Jesus see the situation? Those who received John's baptism, even the publicans, "justified God." Those who like the

lawyers and Pharisees, refused to be baptised, “rejected the counsel of God against themselves.” Rejection of baptism is, in fact, a rejection of God. If this passage does not persuade us of the importance Christ attaches to baptism, nothing ever will. In the face of these words of Christ, could any of us really have the gall to say that “we” consider baptism “unnecessary” or an option: or that, on the question of baptism, we are “neutral,” “impartial” or that we have “an open mind?” Obviously the lawyers and Pharisees rejected the counsel of God *in many other ways*, but this particular comment from Jesus shows us that there is a very real danger of “Rejecting the counsel of God: against ourselves” by *our attitude to baptism*.

CHRIST’S BAPTISM

John’s baptism was, of course, eventually overtaken and replaced by Christ’s baptism. John’s vital function as harbinger, or forerunner, of the Messiah was obviously of a temporary nature, and so was his baptism. John himself said “I must decrease, He must increase.” When Christ, just prior to His ascension, commissioned His apostles to “Go and teach all nations **BAPTISING THEM** in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” the baptism He had in mind was *His own baptism*, not John’s. What was the difference, someone might ask? There were similarities and some differences. For instance, both were by immersion and for the remission of sins, but (as was fully described in last month’s “Scripture Standard” by Bro. Ian Davidson) John’s baptism was not “in the name of Christ and the Holy Spirit” nor did it bring men into the Christian faith, or Church. After Christ’s death, ascension and coronation, however, Christ’s baptism became the “One baptism” (of Eph. 4:5) and thereby rendered the administering of John’s baptism as invalid.

In remote areas, unaware of Christ’s baptism, men continued to administer John’s baptism. Apollos, for instance, the Alexandrian Jew “**Knew only John’s baptism**” and would have remained in this ignorance had not Aquila and Priscilla “**expounded unto him the way of the Lord more perfectly**” (Acts 18:25). Another example is found in Acts 19 where Paul, while visiting Ephesus, discovered 12 men who knew only John’s baptism. Paul explained to them that “**John verily baptised with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people that they should believe on Him which should come after, that is, on Christ Jesus. WHEN THEY HEARD THIS THEY WERE BAPTISED IN THE NAME OF THE LORD JESUS.**” Here were 12 “disciples” of Christ, who, in all good faith, had been baptised with John’s baptism, and had, thereby received remission of sins: albeit had not received the Holy Spirit. Many of us might have said that they had done their best and should be commended. Paul certainly commended them but after explaining that John’s baptism was then invalid he baptised them again with Christ’s baptism: something the men were also keen to do.

The idea that baptism was “unnecessary” was light-years away from the thoughts of Paul.

AN OBJECTION

“But,” someone says, “Did not Paul say that he came not to baptise but to preach the gospel?” This is true, but from a full report of his statement we shall, I think, see that his belief in the importance of baptism was in no way diminished. At that time, in the Corinthian church, there had arisen a habit of members calling themselves after the person who had brought them to Christ. Paul asks, “**Now this I say, that everyone of you saith ‘I am of Paul’ and ‘I am of Apollos’ and I am of ‘Cephas’ and ‘I of Christ.’ Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? OR WERE YE BAPTISED in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptised none of you, but Crispus and Gaius LEST ANY SHOULD SAY that I baptised in my own name. And I baptised also the house of Stephanus: besides I know not whether I baptised any other. For Christ sent me not to baptise but to preach the gospel.**” And so, this verse so often quoted to show Paul’s disinterest in baptism, shows the very opposite. The **ONLY** reason he was glad he

had baptised few of them was **“lest any should say Paul baptised in his own name.”** Paul asks the church members in Corinth **“Were ye baptised in the name of Paul?”** and the answer, of course is **“No! they were all baptised in the name of Christ.”** This shows that *all the church members* had been baptised. Indeed, although Paul had baptised a few of them his function was that of a *preacher* and not a baptiser. He did the preaching: his assistants did the immersions. He came not to baptise but to preach, but when necessary, Paul did the immersions personally. At Corinth for instance, he had immersed Crispus, Gaius, the House of Stephanus and could not remember if there were any others. In the same way we read that **“Jesus made and baptised more disciples than John,”** (John 4:1) but this is qualified in the following verse, **“Though Jesus Himself baptised not, but His disciples.”** Thus Jesus did the preaching, His disciples did the immersions (which, when we come to think of it, is sensible, for it would be very tiring work, when thousands were being baptised every day). It can be said with confidence and safety that in N.T. times all those who entered the kingdom of God, and became members of the various congregations of the Lord’s Church, *were all baptised* (immersed) prior to their entry. This is in stark contrast to the attitude of the “Christian” world of today.

CONCLUSION

Why then should we take baptism seriously? (1) **GOD sent it into the world** through John and latterly through Christ. (2) It came with a vital purpose and God’s intention was not that man should ignore it. (3) John and Christ baptised hundreds of thousands. Were they engaged in some pointless exercise? Was it just to give John something to do? (4) Baptism was, as we have seen, for the remission of sins, but Jesus, who had no sins was, Himself, baptised so that He might obey the will of God and **“Fulfil all righteousness.”** Thus, Jesus thought it important. (5) Jesus in confrontation with the Pharisees chose baptism in His demonstration, that it had come from heaven and that the Pharisees, while claiming to be Godly men, had spurned it. In spurning it they had **“rejected the counsel of God”** against themselves, whereas even the publicans **“justified God”** by their ready obedience to it. (6) When John’s baptism was eventually overtaken and superseded by Christ’s baptism, Paul showed how importantly he regarded baptism by re-baptising with Christ’s baptism, those who already had been baptised with John’s baptism. If Paul was here today I’m sure he would have something to say to the “Christian” world and their general antipathy to this holy ordinance of God. (7) Jesus commanded His apostles to go into all the world to teach the nations and **to baptise them** (Matt. 26:19). Does that make baptism important? (8) Baptism is for **entry into the Kingdom of God** (John 3:3). Should that make it important? (9) Baptism (as well as the blood of Christ) **washes sins away:** (Acts 22:16). Does that make it important. (10) **“Baptism doth also now save us”** (1 Peter 3:21). Should that make baptism important? (11) **“For as many of you as have been baptised into Christ have put on Christ”** (Gal. 3:27). *How many* have “put on” Christ? **“As many as have been baptised into Christ?”** Does that make baptism important? (12) In every recorded case of conversion in the N.T. each penitent was immersed for remission of sins. How then can tract-writers **“forget”** *even to mention it* when they are expounding God’s word to the world on **“How To Be Saved,”** and how can professed Christians sideline baptism into being simply a matter of personal preference: an option, or even something of no consequence at all? God *sent* baptism to us, and Christ *brought it* to us. How then can Christ’s subjects say **“We don’t need it, we don’t like it and we don’t want it.”** If this does not puzzle us all, perhaps it should. If God sent it, that should be reason enough.

GLEANINGS

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

"AND THE LIFE"

"I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me." (John 14:6).

WE QUOTE – DAVID KING THE KING

LOOKING forward to, and placing Himself as it were in the new and glorious, but then future age, when every trophy of war, and violence should become fuel for the fire, Isaiah, with his usual sublimity, exclaimed, "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon His kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment, and with justice from henceforth even for ever." In relation to the same Royal Governor, the prophet says, "He shall not fail, nor be discouraged, till he has set judgment in the earth, and the isles shall wait for His law." It is also written, "The Lord cometh with a strong hand, and His arm shall rule for Him" — "Behold, His reward is with Him, and His whole work is before Him. I have set my king upon my holy hill of Zion." — "Ask of Me, and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession," — "Sit thou on My right hand, until I make thy foes thy footstool."

"FOR THE LIFE WAS MANIFESTED"

To identify the Lord of Lords and mark the period of His enthronement, is our present design. His person has been unmistakably pointed to by the Ancient of Days, not only on one occasion, but on many. "Fear not, Mary, you have found favour with God; and behold you shall conceive, and bear a son, whom you shall name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest, and the Lord will give Him the throne of David His father, and He shall reign over the House of Israel for ever — His reign shall never end." Upon Mary urging an objection, the heavenly messenger continued — "The Holy Spirit will descend upon you and the power of Highest will overshadow you; therefore, the holy progeny shall be called the Son of God." The harbinger of the reign of heaven, having called attention to its immediate approach, introduced to the Jewish people their Messiah, and to humanity, the to-be-enthroned Son of God, and son of man.

"THIS IS MY SON"

Jesus, being baptised, no sooner rose out of the water, than the heavens opened to Him, and the spirit of God appeared, descending like a dove, and lighting upon Him, while a voice from heaven proclaimed, 'This is My Son the beloved, in whom I delight.' Entering at this time upon the work of selecting and instructing a little band, who, after His glorification, were to be seated on the legislative thrones of His kingdom, to fix, and to announce, its laws and ordinances, He conversed with one of them thus:— "Whom say ye, that I, the Son of Man, am? Peter answering, replied, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.' Jesus replying, said, "Flesh and blood hath not revealed this unto thee, but My Father who is in heaven."

"ART THOU THE KING OF THE JEWS ?

Passing numerous confirmatory events, manifestations of divine power, and cruel oppressions of self-loving rulers, we read that the assembly conducted Him to Pilate, "and accused Him, saying, We found this man perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, calling Himself Messiah the King." Then Pilate asking Him

said, "Art thou the King of the Jews?" when Jesus answered, "You say right." When they came to the place called Calvary, there they nailed Him to a cross, and the malefactors also; one at His right hand, and the other at His left. "And Jesus cried, Father forgive them, for they know not what they do." They parted His garments by lot. While the people stood gazing, even their rulers joined them in ridiculing Him, and saying, "This man saved others; let Him save Himself, if He be the Messiah, the elect of God." The soldiers likewise mocked Him, coming with vinegar and saying, "If you be the King of the Jews save yourself. There was also an inscription placed over His head, in Greek, Latin and Hebrew. 'This is the King of the Jews.'"

"FOR THE LIFE WAS MANIFESTED"

But the first day of the week, they went by daybreak to the sepulchre, and found the stone rolled away, and the body of Jesus was not there. While they were in perplexity on this account, behold two men stood by them in robes of dazzling brightness, and said, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen. Remember how He spoke to you before He left Galilee, saying, the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinners and be crucified, and the third day rise again." After manifesting Himself subsequently to His resurrection, during forty days, not openly, but, to His disciples, and having commanded them to remain in Jerusalem till He should endow them with power from on high. While they beheld, He was lifted up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. "Lift up your heads, O ye gates, even lift them up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of Glory shall come in. Who is the King of Glory? The Lord of Hosts (the risen Jesus), He is the king of Glory!"

"THE LORD IS KING"

THE Lord is King ! Lift up thy voice
O earth, and all ye heavens rejoice !
From land to land the joy shall ring,
The Lord omnipotent is King !

The Lord is King ! who then shall dare
Resist His will, distrust His care,
Or murmur at His wise decrees,
Or doubt His royal promises?

The Lord is King ! child of the dust,
The judge of all the earth is just:
Holy and true are all His ways;
Let every creature speak His praise.

J. Condor

Selected by Leonard Morgan.

HOW WILLING AM I ?

What is your "turn-back threshold," your "give-up threshold," your "give-in threshold?" What does it take to make you give up or back up or shut up? How big or how small are the obstacles of the fears that keep you from being what you really want to be as a Christian? Here is hoping that you and the rest of us can be challenged to cross some of our barriers that have grown up around us during past years — perhaps even some of those "insurmountable" barriers. Let us openly and honestly examine ourselves in order to see what it takes to change our "I can't, Lord" into "I am ready, Lord."

WILLING TO DO

"What good things shall I do?" That question of the rich young ruler (Matt. 19:16) has us looking at a person who thought that he really wanted to do God's will. Upon

surveying his relationship to the Law he could say, **“All things have I observed,”** His question, **“What lack I yet?”** indicates a willing heart. How sure he wanted to be that he hadn’t unintentionally missed something that he needed to be doing. And his disposition must have been **“I’ll do whatever is required!”**

Then came the shocker: **“If thou wouldest be perfect, go, sell that which thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shall have treasure in heaven: and come, follow Me”** (Matt. 19:21). That’s a blow to the solar plexus! This “willing” young man is now forced to look at himself, at his past and future. He had thought he would do anything to please his Lord — *but* now . . . **“he went away sorrowful: for he was one that had great possessions”** (Matt. 19:21). He, at this time, could not bring himself to cross that threshold. That was his price.

How willing? Great possessions were his barrier. Surely through his brief mature life he had done many things and given many gifts. But this was a cardinal decision. Had he been less successful and prosperous, had he not been faced with the requirement of giving up so much, he might just have sold out, given the proceeds to the poor, and followed Jesus. Now he learns something about himself that he hadn’t known — he was not really willing to go all the way in order to have eternal life. So, he sold out on his “willing to do” — going back to his life of splendour, with a sorrowing heart. Rejection ! Dejection !

The rich young ruler isn’t the only one who ever made such a wrong choice. Look at Demas. Of him the apostle Paul wrote, **“Demas forsook me, having loved the present world, and went to Thessalonica”** (2 Tim. 4:10). **“Having loved this present world”** — does that imply that he persevered until things became to threatening in Rome? Does it mean that he had served Paul until it appeared that he might himself become involved in some related consequences of Paul’s conviction? Perhaps he had served valiantly and cheerfully. He loved the Lord, he loved His Master’s cause, he loved Paul — but his service stopped at a given point. Loving the world was his downfall. This does not suggest he was grossly worldly, but it reveals his service to his Lord was not from an “all the way” heart. Paul’s was a “come what may” faith and dedication; Demas was an “up to a point” faith.

WHAT IS MY PRICE ?

Crossing the norm-line. Let me prayerfully and purposefully resolve to step across that line which is the comfortable norm of my performance in any given area of service. Will you make the same decision? Coming to the point where we normally stop, where experience has established a “no further” barrier, let’s move across! Let’s for this once shove aside that “Wait,” that “Not today,” that “Some other time” — and dare to do! This is the only way we can grow.

Does this mean that we will at times be inconvenienced? Indeed so. Does it mean that we try that which we have previously avoided because we were afraid? Certainly. Will the comfortable norms of expenditure (time, energy, money) be raised? They must be.

“I Just Can’t Believe It.” Oh, how the Lord blesses and uses those who are willing to be used to His glory! This is no “use me at my convenience” willingness, nor is it a “use me where I want to be used” volunteering. Rather it is a “Lord, use me where you know that I can best be used, doing what will be most valuable to the advancement of your cause” surrender to His leadership. Now what a surge of vigour and power is realised in life! So real is this, so rewarding, that the servant is heard to say, “I just can’t believe it!” That’s one of those expressions of gratitude and joy which might just as easily be said in the word “Hallelujah!” Wonderful! Praise the Lord!

“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, unto him be the glory in the Church and in Jesus Christ unto all generations for ever and ever. Amen.” (Eph. 3:20,21).

C. Rogers.

CHURCH GOVERNMENT

I would like to say how helpful and informative I found the article by Bro. Boland in the December issue of the S.S. I also share his concern about innovations.

However, Brian — for whom I have deepest regard — takes a statement out of context and uses it to support his main argument; it might help to look again at what I said: quote “When we have given into the treasury, we shouldn’t keep peering over the shoulders of these men to see how they administer it; we put them in office, and consequently we should trust them. They should, however, keep their respective assemblies fully informed, and if there seems to be a misuse of funds then the church has a right to ask questions.” unquote.

The foregoing implies four essentials, (a) Elders and Deacons come **from** the assembly, (b) they are sought out **by** the assembly as being fit to govern, (c) they are responsible in all things **to** the assembly, and (d) they can be removed from office **by** the assembly which sought them out. When I used the expression about ‘not peering over their shoulders’, I was simply saying “let them get on with the job of administering the finances of the church.” If I instructed a solicitor or accountant to look after my affairs, I wouldn’t be telephoning every hour of the day to check on them. When it became clear that they were not acting in my best interests, **then** would be the time to take some action. Similarly, when it becomes clear that Elders and Deacons are not acting in the best interests of Christ and His Church **then** it is the right, no, the bounden duty of the assembly to take some action; if need be, the ultimate action.

I may have grossly misinterpreted what Brian says, but it would seem to me that Elders and Deacons act only in an **advisory** capacity to the Church, and then **ratify** decisions which the Church makes: is this what we are saying? I find this a rather strange idea. Yes, by all means, the Church must be kept informed of decisions which concern them. Yes, by all means, their cooperation must be sought for projects which concern the whole Church. But what about those deep personal problems of a spiritual and scriptural nature which an Elder may have to unravel? When I was an Elder at Albert Street I had to deal with a number of such cases. Some were very personal and involved the disclosure of intimate details. Sometimes the problem could be resolved internally with due contrition and repentance by the offending party. In those cases it seemed most prudent to keep intimate details secret in order to avoid sorrow and distress possibly to other members of a family. Things have been said to me which I shall never disclose. If that constitutes ‘lording it over the assembly’ then I am guilty, but unrepentant. Has an Elder the right to keep the church uninformed in such circumstances? I believe so.

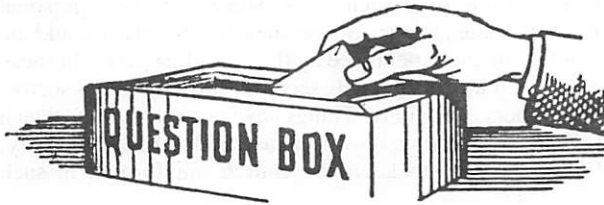
NERVOUS

I wonder why brethren are so nervous as to think the so-called ‘purity’ of the Church can be diluted. I appreciate the dangers as much as the next brother or sister, but we encounter dangers in every aspect of our lives. How we survive intact is a measure of the prior preparation we have made. The Deuteronomists had the right idea; they passed on to succeeding generations the essentials which needed to be preserved. If Oversights in the Church did the same, then I venture to suggest that the essentials of the faith would be preserved; I think it would be only weak and faithless men who would allow error and corruption to creep in (they probably shouldn’t have been appointed anyway). This is why it is essential that scriptural oversights should be set up and maintained. Brian says that papacy crept in after a comparatively short period of time. So it did, but we must remember that the Church was in an embryonic state, and the Apostles had gone, the so-called early Church Fathers exhibited a fair degree of disagreement. We on the other hand, have almost two thousand years of Christian history to learn from, and surely that must mean something when we try to follow the injunction of Paul in ‘guarding the deposit.’

It is all a matter of what we see as innovatory. We have seen the advent of Bible Schools, Women's Meetings, etc. Are these innovations? Do they detract from the purity of the doctrine? As far as I know they are **textually** unscriptural but **inherent** in the scriptures as expedients. What about computerised evangelism? Is that a novelty? If it is then it is innovatory. Personally, I don't see any of these as destructive of the doctrine. At our Fellowship Week-end at Longshoot we had a lecture on 'church development.' Some present viewed this with some distaste saying it was bringing 'business' techniques into the Church. The businessman uses such techniques to promote the manufactured product. Well, we are in the 'business' of promoting Christ and his Church. If such techniques will assist the laudable objective, and do not contravene scripture, should they be looked upon as innovatory and shunned completely? Are we so brain-fatigued that we can't tell the difference between right and wrong? Are we so bemused that we would allow a modern-day Ignatius to take dictatorial control of the Church? It is true that we are seeing an organisation, purporting to be the Church of Christ, using unscriptural techniques in the promotion of the Gospel, but it cannot succeed if it is not following God's pattern, nor will it de-stabilise those who are. If we get scripturally and spiritually orientated **leaders** and if we ensure that there is a **continuity** of such, then we shall not go wrong. We are more dedicated and steadfast than we sometimes believe our selves to be.

So let us press on. In the words of Paul, "Whitherto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing." Phil.3:18. You know, some Christians bring innovations into the Church because they have forgotten how they arrived at the point where they are and the things which have brought them there. Let us **do well** the things that we **know well**. There will then be no need for unscriptural innovations.

Alf Marsden,
20 Costessy Way Winstanley,
Wigan. WN3 6ES.



Conducted by
Alf Marsden

"Do you think it is right for a Christian to make New Year Resolutions?"

This question was put to me almost as an aside by a fellow-Christian the other day. We were discussing all the hectic rush by people to get their Christmas shopping done, and wondering whether the holiday was just a good excuse for people engaging in a good 'blow-out.' O yes, the carols would extol the birth of the Saviour, perhaps from many lips that did not care to mention His name at any other time of the year; Christmas-Eve masses would be well attended, as would Christmas Day Services; Hogmanay would be celebrated north of the border, and instead of children demanding the traditional piece of cake, some youths might be demanding a small bottle of whisky; the whole thing would, as is now customary, be artificially contrived by retailers intent on parting people from their money, and granting excesses to children which they don't really need. Yes, the 'season' would be upon us again; the police would be out with their drink detectors; some in the prime of their lives would be cut down stupidly and never see 1995; lights would be flashing, not only in the streets, but perhaps in the heads of those who had taken too much drink. Am I being too 'Scrooge-

like'? I don't think so, for Christians, much as we abhor the excesses, are nonetheless caught up in the general euphoria along with our children and grand-children, but we keep a clear perspective of our calling, and when the name of Christ falls from our lips either in song, carol or talk, we give that name the reverence which we always give it.

So what about this question? Personally I have never seen any significant difference between December, 31st and January 1st. If the Lord tarries, night will come, the dawn will break, it may rain a little or it may not, those who have physical and chronic diseases will find that they are still there when the dawn breaks on the day of the new year, and so life will go on. I appreciate, however, that this particular time of year means a lot to some people; they see it as an opportunity to make a new start, as it were. Bearing in mind, however, the original question, I feel I should pose a further question, "Should it be **necessary** for a Christian to make New Year Resolutions?" I will attempt to answer both questions.

WHAT IS A RESOLUTION?

This could be defined strictly as 'a formal expression of opinion by legislative body or public meeting.' In the general terms of such a definition, the verb 'to resolve' would mean 'to decide upon, solve, explain, settle, etc.' This is done many times in industry, business, the legislature, and in our own Church meetings. As applied to individuals (in the context of which we are studying it) each individual makes a resolution with himself or herself, so if we break it we have only ourselves to blame.

The questioner asks if it is **right** for Christians to make resolutions. If I resolve to do something which elevates the Lord's name, is socially acceptable, and is of benefit to my fellow-man, then it is difficult to see where that could be wrong. However, I return to my earlier statement: should it be **necessary** for a Christian to make New Year Resolutions? Let's explore this a little further by considering some of the more common resolutions which people seem to make.

IS THIS YOU

You are a little short tempered and consequently you get angry with people at work and at home. You make a resolution that you are going to do better by curbing your anger. But you are a Christian! Hasn't anyone taught you, or have you not read in the Bible, that as a Christian you are not supposed to lose your temper and get angry with people. Eph. 4:26 says, "**Be angry, and do not sin: do not let the sun go down on your wrath**" (A.V.). Now this is not a command to be angry; it literally means 'do not sin in anger,' and always bear in mind that there is great danger in a settled mood of anger. You see, there is no need for a resolution at a specific time of the year; you should have been doing all the time. "It is not easy", you say; well, of course, it isn't, and it isn't easy either for the people on whom you vent your wrath. Eph. 4:31 teaches us, "**Let all bitterness, wrath, anger . . . be put away from you.**" The glorious thought is that you don't have to wrestle by yourself; He who dwells within you will assist.

You are somewhat lax in your attendance at worship, gospel, and Bible study meetings. You make a resolution that you are going to do better, and that you are going to attend more meetings. But don't you see that if it's mere attendance you are resolving to improve, then without the motivation of the love of Christ and the Word, you are doomed to failure. You will soon find that the obstacles which kept you away previously will, before long, do so again. In Heb. 10 we read, "**Let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching**" Heb. 10:24,25. We have no option, you see. The Day may be approaching faster than we think. Are we going to wait for the beginning of a new year to resolve to do what we should be doing now?

When you think about your lifestyle and the things you possess, you may conclude

that you could give more to the Lord. But you don't need a special resolution to do that, do you? Some Christians have the mistaken idea that if they put more money into the treasury then they are doing all that is necessary. The important man at the Beautiful gate of the temple fixed his eyes on Peter and John expecting to receive alms from them, but Peter said, "**Silver and gold I do not have but what I do have I give to you.**" and as we know he made the man walk. Acts 3:6. We all have things to give to the Lord *as well as* or *in place of* money: time, compassion, the helping hand, interpersonal skills, and many other attributes which we can give. Surely we are all aware that when we give ourselves to the Lord we give all things into His service. Anything less does despite to His name.

I am reminded of the words of the poet *John Donne*,
 Since Christ embraced the Cross itself dare I
 His image, the image of His Cross deny?
 Would I have profit by the sacrifice,
 And dare the chosen altar to despise?
 It bore all other sins, but is it fit
 That it should bear the sin of scorning it?

Brethren, have we *given* ourselves to the Lord, or have we only *said* that we have given ourselves to Him?

CONCLUSION

Well, by now you will probably have got the gist of what I am saying. The Christian will realise that the transition from December 31st to January 1st is marked by the constancy of resolve made by him or her at their conversion to Christ. We tread the road He has mapped out for us in faith and love and with a sure tread. The division of time which we acknowledge as real is from when we gave ourselves to Him, and until we see Him face to face. Then, of course, time will not matter.

Obviously there are other examples I could have given but I feel sure that, in the context of what I have said, we will be able to work these out for ourselves. A happy New Year to all.

(All questions, please, to Alf Marsden,
 20 Costessy Way, Winstanley, Wigan WN3 6ES).

SCRIPTURE READINGS

| | | |
|--------|-----------------|------------------------|
| Feb 5 | Psalms 105:1-22 | Acts 21:1-19 |
| Feb 12 | Numbers 6:1-21 | Acts 21:20-40 |
| Feb 19 | Isaiah 43: 1-13 | Acts 22:1-21 |
| Feb 26 | Exodus 22:16-31 | Acts 22:22 to 23:11 |

PAUL'S JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM

Acts 21:1-18 is one of the "we - passages" in Luke's record, which means that Luke travelled with Paul to Jerusalem. The journey to them to Cos - a massive and mountainous island off the south-west coast of Asia Minor; then to Rhodes, a large island lying across the main sea-route between the Aegean and the Phoenician ports. Patara was the next port of call, which was a seaport of

S.W. Lycia in the Xanthus valley. From Patara the ship sailed to Tyre, the principal seaport of the Phoenician coast associate with the city of Sidon. Tyre has had a long history. Hiram, its king, befriended David and Solomon, and supplied materials for the buildings in Jerusalem, including the temple. Nebuchadnezzar besieged Tyre for thirteen years before it fell in 574 B.C. In 332 B.C. Alexander the Great laid siege to the city for seven months and finally captured it. As regards the coming of Christianity to Tyre, F.F. Bruce has written: "The origins of the church of Tyre are nowhere expressly recorded, but they belong most certainly to the evangelization of Phoenicia by dispersed Hellenistic Christians from Jerusalem after Stephen's death."

From Tyre the group journeyed to Ptolemais, twenty-five miles south of Tyre. Ptolemais was known as Acco or Accho in Old Testament times and was one of the cities assigned to the tribe of Asher, although never occupied by the Hebrews. The name was changed in honour of Ptolemies. It was an important port and, in many ways, the key of Galilee. Caesarea was the next port of call. This city was built by Herod the Great and named in honour of Augustus Caesar. Caesarea was the official residence both of the Herodian kings and the Roman procurators. It had many fine palaces, public buildings and an amphitheatre, as well as a huge temple dedicated to Caesar and Rome.

The city stood, with varying fortunes, until A.D. 1256 when Sultan Baybars of Egypt captured it and destroyed its walls and most of its buildings. A stone bearing Pilate's name was found in the theatre.

Caesarea was the home of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven deacons chosen by the apostles (Acts 6:5). He was the man who took the gospel to the Samaritans (Acts 8:5-13) and who brought about the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-40). It is interesting to read that he "had four daughters, virgins, who did prophesy" (21:9). This fact was the subject of prophecy itself: "And it shall come to pass afterwards, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: and also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my Spirit" (Joel 2:28-29).

PAUL TAKEN INTO CUSTODY

Agabus had prophesied of trouble ahead for Paul in Jerusalem (21:10-11). He spoke the truth. The hostile Jews supposed that Paul had taken a Gentile (Trophimus of Ephesus) into the temple. It was all utterly false, of course, but it led to an almighty outcry by the Jews, which, but for the timely action

of the Roman garrison could have ended in Paul's violent death. Later, Paul was given permission by the Roman tribune to address the crowd. He caught their attention by speaking in their Aramaic vernacular.

Paul told them of his zeal for God and his strict devotion to the ancestral law. One commentator has written: "As his speech is summarised by Luke, it emphasises those aspects in Paul's story which might make a special appeal to such hearers - his upbringing in Jerusalem, his education at the feet of Gamaliel, his fanatical persecution of 'the Way' the part played in his conversion and call by Ananias of Damascus, 'a devout man according to the law,' and the subsequent confirmation of his call in the Jerusalem temple itself, where the risen Lord appeared to him in a vision and sent him 'far away to the Gentiles'" (22:3-21).

The tribune gave orders for Paul to be scourged. Roman citizens were exempted from such punishment and Paul, pointing this out to the centurion, forced him to suspend the operation. The tribune on hearing the news became very alarmed because he had not treated a Roman citizen with due legal procedure. One of the great works on Roman citizenship is A.N. Sherwin-White's book *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament*. In it he points out that when the chief captain or tribune, Claudius Lysias (23:26), informed Paul that he had acquired his Roman citizenship by purchase (22:28), this referred to the bribe given to intermediaries in the imperial secretariat or the provincial administration . . . "Bribery and corruption have been around for millennia. Sad to say that they are still prominent in many countries of the world. They are the fruit of sin.

PAUL BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN

Paul was being charged with an offence against Jewish law and, therefore, the Sanhedrin was the proper body to handle the matter. So he was brought

before this famous council, "which was provided over at this time by a high priest of very doubtful reputation, Ananias the son of Nedebeaus (A.D. 47-58)" (F.F. Bruce). No accusers presented themselves before the Sanhedrin at that time and so Paul took full opportunity to say a word himself. He began with a rebuke to the high priest for his conduct and then enlisted the goodwill of the Pharisaic members of the council because the whole issue on which he stood before them rested on the resurrection. (**"For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, and that there are neither angels or spirits, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all"** [23:8, N.I.V.]). So a great uproar ensued among the members of the Sanhedrin over Paul and his beliefs, which resulted in his being rescued once again by the tribune's troops. That night he received great encouragement from the Lord, who stood by him and said: **"Be of good cheer, Paul: for as you have testified of me in Jerusalem, so you must bear witness also at Rome."** (23:11).

SUMMARY

The apostle Paul is one of the great men of history. When he encountered Jesus in Nazareth, he became a totally changed man. Prior to that he had been an ardent Jew of the Pharisaical party — uncompromising, intolerant and bigoted. Worse, he was a persecutor of the early disciples of Christ and rejoiced in their imprisonments and death. Jesus turned his world upside-down (the right way up!). His subsequent missionary journeys for the Master are all a joy to read because his message was a message of joy or good news for a fallen world. He travelled widely, suffered much, but remained resolute at all times in his service for Christ. Nothing really shook his faith. He said to the Ephesian elders: **"But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of**

the grace of God" (Acts 20:24).

Paul must have been a great man to know and be with. One's spirit must have been lifted in his presence. To me it is no wonder that people like Barnabas, Timothy, Luke, Titus, Priscilla, Aquila, Epaphroditus, etc. supported him with a devotion that knew no limits. One commentator has put it this way: "Priscilla and Aquila risked their lives for him in a dangerous situation. Epaphroditus of Philippi overtaxed his strength and suffered an almost fatal illness in his anxiety to be of service to the imprisoned apostle. Timothy readily surrendered whatever personal ambitions he might have cherished in order to play the part of a son to Paul and help him in his missionary activities, showing a selfless concern for others that matched the apostles own eagerness to spend and be spent for them."

Ian S. Davidson,
Motherwell.

NEWS FROM THE CHURCHES

Slamannan District: The Mutual Benefit Meeting of the above District took place on 3rd December, at Tranent Meeting Place when John Kneller presided and the two speakers: John Colgan, Tranent, and Bill Cook, Dunfermline, dealt with the subject: "Why is love said to be greater than hope and faith in 1 Cor. 13". As usual a great time of fellowship was enjoyed and a great deal more, than was thought, emerged from the subject. The next proposed meeting God willing, will be on Saturday, 4th March at Dennyloanhead, at 4.00 p.m. when the subject will be "Can Christians buy National Lottery Tickets since most of the proceeds go to good works and charity and nobody loses much? Is it evil to win money? Why?" We thank the sisters at Tranent for their tea and hospitality.

Harry McGinn (Sec).

WALKING AND WAITING

The ingredient that is needed to effect a serene, or peaceful heart in this day and age, is a godly walk. We needs must be, walking the way of the Lord. To achieve this, the wonderful truths of the Bible must become **living realities**. Not stories. Not records, but living truths; we must let the Holy Spirit apply them.

We must submit to Him, because it is through the working of the Holy Spirit within, that creates the blessing of a peaceful heart.

To experience the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit (depicted in Rom. 8:16), one should experience a daily time of devotion and fellowship with other believers.

We need to encourage one-another.

We are under obligation, as Christians, to obey the laws that flow from God's holy nature.

We need to strive to do right.

We have the ingredients for a satisfying life.

We, knowing Christ as Saviour, have the joyous assurance that living is worth-while God is **willing and able** to keep us: It's a promise of God himself.

We need to take a positive attitude toward the gospel.

In following Christ, a peaceful heart and worth-while life will be found.

"Hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God to keep all His commandments, which I command thee this day: that which is right in the eyes of the Lord thy God." (Deut. 13:18).

Beloved, we must take care not to make a ritual of our worship.

Hearken, listen, walk, follow, praise and worship these are part-and-parcel of the Christian's duty and joy.

It should be a joyous experience to praise and worship.

If we walk obediently, we will find heart and soul at peace with God and self: a wonderful blessing.

The way of the Lord is sure. Life – abundant in Christ, is assured to those that walk fully in the way of the Lord.

Psalm 19:7-9 reads:-

"The law of the Lord is perfect converting the soul, the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.

The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart, the commandment of the Lord is pure enlightening the eyes.

The fear of the Lord is clear, enduring forever; the judgements of the Lord are true and righteous altogether"

Need more be said . . . perfect . . . enlightening . . . enduring, is the word of God . . . beloved take time to be holy. It's for the best . . .

Andrew P. Sharp,
Newtongrange.

TEST YOUR BIBLICAL KNOWLEDGE

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Who were Abraham's two brothers? 2. Who said "I am a man of unclean lips." 3. Reuben wanted to spare whose life? 4. What did Paul ask Timothy to bring to him in prison? | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Who was Rachel's maidservant? 6. Where did Jesus raise the widow's only son from the dead? 7. Who was the youngest son of Jacob? 8. Who was Abraham's second wife? 9. Who was the mother of Ishmael? 10. Where did Paul deliver his first sermon? |
|--|---|

GHANA APPEAL

We are delighted to inform the readers of the *Scripture Standard* that the Ghana Appeal has now collected over £50,000 since the appeal began in mid 1989. This has gone far beyond our most optimistic expectations and we thank everyone who has contributed to this appeal. We give God thanks for those who have generously given in the spirit of love and for those in Ghana who have wisely distributed as they saw fit, that this combination has been fruitful in the Church growing spiritually and numerically. We have sent out more Medical aid and we are presently waiting for a feedback on the Twi Bibles sent last month. We thank those who have individually sent tracts and parcels to our brethren. The Sister who was ill with a serious skin disease continues to make good progress, we continue to hear of baptisms and the growth of the Church throughout Ghana.

Those wishing to help with this work,

please contact:- Graeme Pearson, 13 Fairways, Dunfermline, Fife. KY12 0DU. Tel.: 0383 728624.

P.S. Received with thanks £50 from IMB on the 9th of November. (Receipt number 578).

COMING EVENTS

TRANENT SOCIAL

18th March, 1995

Speakers:

Jimmy Grant & John Dodsley

1. Nahor and Haran (Gen. 11:26).
2. Isaiah (Isa. 6:5).
3. Joseph (Gen. 37:21).
4. Cloak and scrolls (2 Tim. 4:13).
5. Bilhah (Gen. 29:29).
6. Naim (Luke 7:11).
7. Benjamin (Gen. 35:18).
8. Keturah (Gen. 25:1).
9. Hagar (Gen. 16:15).
10. Damascus (Acts 9:19-20).

ANSWERS

SUBSCRIPTION RATE INCREASE

I am sorry to have to announce an increase in the price of the *Scripture Standard*. The new rates are shown below and take effect from January 1995.

The last increase in the subscription rate was October 1991. While every effort is made to keep costs to a minimum, there was an increase in postal rates last year and the cost of printing has increased with this issue which taken together make it advisable to increase the price.

I trust you will continue to subscribe and that the magazine can contribute to your spiritual life in the future.

John Kneller, Treasurer.

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