

The **SCRIPTURE STANDARD**

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

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THE KING'S NEW CLOTHES

EVERYBODY knows about the king who was sold the non-existent clothes and when the queen saw that he was so enamoured with the clothes and that he was so taken-in by them that she did not have the heart to disillusion him on the matter and joined him in the admiration of the supposed clothes. The royal court officials and chamberlains were quick to catch on to the situation and added their profuse admiration of the king in his non-existent new clothes so much so that they organised a splendid parade in which the king could show off to the whole kingdom his new and striking outfit. It took a small boy on the edge of the procession who did not know what was going on, and what he was supposed to say, to exclaim, "Look at the king. The king has no clothes on." I sometimes think that that is very often the position within the religious denominations of the world. Each one trots out the well-worn and trite phrases, the recognised jargon, and each defends to the end the stance taken by that particular body. That same stance may have been taken many hundreds of years before (e.g. by the Roman Catholic Church) or it may have been of fairly recent origin (say by the 'Jehovah's Witnesses'). To be fair to everyone it is recognised that a man or woman may have been born into a household with a particular religious persuasion and have been nurtured in the particular religious beliefs of that household and may therefore experience great difficulty in escaping from such an environment and throwing off a lifetime's religious bias. This must be particularly true of those in the Latin countries.

Happy are we to be able to come to the Word of God with an uncomplicated religious background and not to have our minds trammelled with stubborn misconceptions regarding the scriptures received from one we respected as 'a man of God'. How often does one encounter the objection to some sound piece of scriptural teaching that it runs contrary to what 'so-and-so' says and 'so-and-so' is a much-respected local man of God'.

All of this was brought home to me again the other day as I was having a friendly discussion with a young man in the office. Long before he told me to what religious persuasion he belonged I had already guessed it. He came out with the same stereotyped terms and phrases as others I had heard often in the past. Closer examination revealed that he could not entirely justify his statements but he used them just because he had heard them so often and had been taught to use them. Many religious denominations can be recognised in the same way. From my fairly frequent discussions with Jehovah's Witnesses' I feel that I do not do them an injustice when I say that they have a religious vocabulary all of their own and that the vast majority of their itinerant preachers could not define a large proportion of the terminology in their publications - for example in "Let God be True". There is always the danger that we too, as members of the Lord's church, could fall into such a condition. Rather than 'rock the boat' we would go along

with whatever seems acceptable to all. Like those who dutifully admired the king's new clothes we slavishly trot out the party line' on all 'doctrinal matters'. There should certainly be no 'party line' in the kingdom of God and if we say a thing or believe a thing it should be because the Word of God teaches it. There should be an independency of mind amongst us brethren, to at least this extent, that we all measure what is done and said religiously and measure it by the standard contained in the scriptures.

I realise that this independent approach goes all very well with the majority of brethren when confronted with the blacks and whites of an issue but is more difficult with the different shades of grey, and this is surely very understandable. When, for instance, do expedients in the church become innovations and most religious disunity in the church must surely be a direct, or indirect result of the innovations in the church. Many brethren currently adopt a 'king's new clothes attitude to some of the innovations which have been embraced by some of the churches. We must beware of innovations brethren, and hopefully be able to recognise them when we see them for some would say that certain innovations are not innovations but lawful expedients. After all, we can see that once we take a step, just one step, away from the narrow path set out in the Word of God there is no stopping place, as witness the Roman Catholic Church. Most innovations are introduced, of course, with the best of intentions and at the outset there is an honest purpose to be met. Later on however when later generations make an examination in the matter and pronounce the innovations as unscriptural it is then that the scramble to retain them begins. Perhaps no-one wants to admit that the church has been engaged in practices of an apparently unscriptural nature and so many of the brethren rally to the defence of the particular innovation and a diligent search is made of the scriptures to see if any chapter and verse can be found to justify what has been done and to thus allow it to continue to be done. Certainly it seems much more easy to introduce an innovation into the worship than to get rid of it. It can become an unwelcome guest. It can become a matter over which brethren take sides and so the seeds of disunity and division (certainly friction) are sown — and it need not be. An interesting quotation appeared recently in a fine little paper called "The Truth" on the subject of innovations, taken from 'Lard's Quarterly' (by Moses E. Lard) and I feel it is worth reproducing — it is as follows. 'The spirit of innovation is a peculiar spirit. While coming in it is the meekest and gentlest of spirits; only it is marvellously firm and persistent. But when going out, no term but fiendish can describe it. It comes in humming the sweetest notes of Zion: it goes out amid the ruin it works, howling like an exorcised demon. At first it is supple as a willow twig: you can bend it mould it, shape it to anything; only it will have its way. But when once it has fully got its way then mark how it keeps its footing. It now calls for reason, for argument, for scripture, but no more has it an ear for reason, argument or Scripture than has the image of Baal. Argue with the spirit of innovation indeed! I would as soon be cracking syllogisms over the head of the man of sin. Never. Rebuke it in the name of the Lord: if it go not out expel it. This only will cure it. ...' What a fitting commentary on innovations and how very true.

Come up with a good reason for a seemingly good innovation and depending upon who you are, you may very well get a good support. The dumb and patronising acquiescence of the king's courtiers is still ever present in the world of men and women. Let us beware of those who would add to, or subtract from, the complete and eternal Word of the Living God. It must be true to say that when disunity exists in the Lord's body it is not related to the main and cardinal doctrines of the New Testament but usually has to do with some trivial matter which could be dispensed with but for the stubborn nature of us human beings. There doubtless is more controversy over what the scriptures do not say than over what they do say, and surely that must constitute a thought for thinkers.

Paul says to the disciple at Corinth (1 Cor. 11 2) "Now I praise you brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you..." In other words he did not want the doubtful wisdom of man superimposed upon the ordinances of God, whether well intentioned or not. "All scripture is given by the inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto every good work". It might come as a surprise to us but God does not need us to perfect His ordinances.

EDITOR.

IT IS MY PSALM — IS IT YOURS ?

Then within His house he led me.
Brought me where the feast was spread:
Made me eat with Him my Father,
I who begged the bondsman's bread.

Not a suppliant at His gateway,
But a Son within His home,
To the love, the joy, the singing,
To the glory I am come .

PERFECT PROVISION 'THOU PREPAREST A TABLE BEFORE ME' Psalm 23:5

W.M. Thomson in the Land and the Book, may be of some help to us, as we consider this month's meditation, he writes:— 'In ordinary circumstances the shepherd does not feed his flock except by leading and guiding them where they may gather for themselves; but there are times when it is otherwise. Late in autumn, when the pastures are dried up, and in winter, in places covered with snow, he must furnish them food. or they die. In the vast oak woods along the eastern sides of Lebanon, between Baalbek and the cedars. there are then gathered innumerable flocks, and the shepherds are all day long in the bushy trees, cutting down the branches, upon whose green leaves and tender twigs the sheep and goats are entirely supported. The same is true in all mountain districts, and large forests are preserved on purpose. Life in these remote and wild woods is then most singular and romantic. The ring of the axe, the crash of falling trees, the shout of the shepherds, the tinkling of bells and barking of dogs. wake a thousand echoes along the deep wadies of Lebanon'.

David, the writer of my Psalm, was the youngest son of Jesse, and it was said of him, "he keepeth the sheep". Therefore I have no doubt in my mind that he too, knew of the conditions that prevailed in that land where he kept his Father's flock. At one time in certain districts in Syria, and under certain conditions food was raised off the earth, on little trestles, or "tables", to enable the sheep to feed, without harm, from the biting of noisome creatures. It may be that David himself had improvised under certain conditions for his own sheep, and if he did so, no doubt once again he mused, 'as I have been to my sheep, so the Lord is to me', so realizing God's goodness he says, "Thou preparest a table before me". What a table! What a feast! What delicacies!

PERFECT SALVATION

"The Lord is my shepherd"

PERFECT SECURITY

"I shall not want

PERFECT REST

"He maketh me to lie down in green pastures"

PERFECT REFRESHMENT

"He leadeth me besides the still waters"

PERFECT RESTORATION

"He restoreth my soul"

PERFECT GUIDANCE

"He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake".

PERFECT PROTECTION

"Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil"

PERFECT COMPANION

"For thou art with me"

PERFECT PROVISION

"Thou preparest a table before me"

Note how he talks about the Lord, note how he talks to the shepherd, he enjoyed a glorious fellowship with the one who had been so gracious to him. We have no need to wonder why Samuel said "the Lord hath sought him a man after his own heart" 1 Samuel 13:14. "Thou preparest a table before me". I will bless the Lord at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth". "O magnify the Lord with me and let us exalt his name together". "O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him". "O fear the Lord, ye his saints: for there is no want to them that fear him" Psalm 34:1,3 8,9. 'Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me bless his holy name Bless the Lord O my soul and forget not all his benefits" Psalm 103:1, 2.

It is interesting to write about the table which was prepared for David, but if we are God's children, this Psalm belongs to us, so we can affirm with the one who kept the sheep, "thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies." The blessings which the Lord so graciously bestowed upon the one who became the King of Israel, can be ours in all fulness, if we have fully surrendered our lives to the Lord Jesus. Let us make time to go with our shepherd

once more to the 'green pastures', to the pastures of tender grass, then on with Him to the 'still waters', the waters of quietness. Come with 'the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys' and say with the writer of the Song of Solomon, "I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love" chapter 2:3,4.

**SALVATION SECURITY--REST--REFRESHMENT -- RESTORATION -- GUIDANCE --
PROTECTION -- COMPANION -- PROVISION**

What does this mean? my brother, my sister, it means we can have the pleasure of the presence of the Lord Jesus for every moment of every day.

Jesus, Thou art everything to me,
Jesus, Thou art everything to me.
All my lasting joys are found in Thee,
Jesus, Thou art everything to me.

On our table is "the bread of life". And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger" John 6:35. It is worthy of note that the "bread of life" is 'living bread'. Jesus said, I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which is for the life of the world'. John 6:51.

On our table is 'living water'. Jesus answered and said unto her, "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith unto thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water" John 4:10. Then in reply to the woman of Samaria he said:— but whosoever drinketh of the water that I give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life" John 4:14. What a table! What a feast! What delicacies! What more does the child of God want? Nothing! He can be satisfied with the "LIVING BREAD" and the "LIVING WATER".

THOU PREPAREST A TABLE BEFORE ME"

Now with what words can one adequately describe the LORD'S TABLE, prepared before me each Lord's Day, set for God's own children, to remember the life, and death, and glorious resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. What a table! What a feast! What delicacies!

"O what a feast ineffable is this!
Thy table spread with more than angels' food --
Angels the highest never taste the bliss,
The dear communion of Thy flesh and blood."

"And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said 'Take eat: this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it, For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom" Matt. 26:26-29.

We thank our loving heavenly Father for this means of grace, this manifestation of divine love, the gift to fallen humanity of His only begotten and well-beloved Son. As we come to this table prepared for those who have identified themselves with Him, (see Romans 6:1-11) we need examine ourselves, realizing our sinfulness, and asking for forgiveness. The apostle Paul said "But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body" 1 Cor 11:28,29.

SON of the living God, Thy name we sing;
Our Jesus glorified! our Christ and King!
Made higher than the heavens, with glory crowned;
Who stooped to death that life might evermore abound.

We sing the power that brought from death's deep night
The joys of immortality to light;

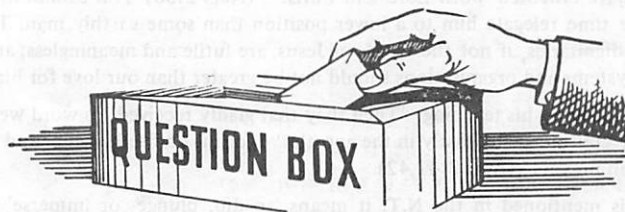
That rolled away the shadows from the tomb,
And gave us life in Him who dissipates its gloom.

Great Lord of life! our dear Redeemer! Thou
Art all our joy, be all our comfort now!
We trace Thy dying love yet still would see
The brightness of the Father's glory full in Thee.

Come then, O Saviour, Bread and Wine of heaven.
Refresh our souls with food Thy grace hath given;
Be in our midst to bless the feast divine
That makes us feel indeed that we are truly Thine.

Having come to the place called Calvary, by way of the table prepared sitting in quiet contemplation, we see a little of His beauty and glory, and we can say with the other disciples, who said to Thomas, "We have seen the Lord", Matt. 20:25, and later with Thomas who said: "My Lord and my God" Matt. 20:28 It may be that some have neglected the Lord's table, and have lost their first love, why not make a fresh start, remember the life of our Lord Jesus was not taken it was given, freely for your sin and mine. The table is prepared, we can of course accept or reject that table we have the privilege to say Yes or No to the invitation. Say Yes to Jesus And may the Lord's richest blessing be your portion.

This months exercise: Learn by heart John 6:51 and John 4:14. LEONARD MORGAN



Conducted by
Alf Marsden

"My friend says that there are probably many christians in many denominations. I have always understood that there is only one church revealed in the N.T. Does the church of the Lord then, cut across many religious groups, or can the Church be identified? Could you please comment on this as it is causing me some concern? Also, could you please say what the relationship is between Baptism and the Church?"

It appears that an increasing number of people some of them christians, are saying that the Church of Christ cannot be truly identified in the world. It may be to the eternal shame of those who comprise the Church that this is so, because God has certainly not left us without the means of identification. I am fully aware that in the final analysis God will be the sole judge of who His children really are, but having said that, I am equally conscious that the Word does not teach me that the Church, the Body of Christ, is fragmented among denominational groups. Why do I make the latter statement? For the very good reason that the Church as revealed in the N.T. is clearly illustrated as being un-denominational. There just were no denominations; as a matter of fact we find Paul rebuking the party spirit in Corinth (1 Cor. 3:3-8).

Why, then, do we find ourselves in this complex situation? Of one thing we can be sure; *God is not the author of confusion*. If this is so, then man, probably under the promptings of Satan, is. Let us look at some of the guidelines which may assist us in answering these questions. I hope the questioner will bear with me if we don't complete the answer in this issue.

What is a Christian?

In Acts 11:26 we read "And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch". So if we can decide what a disciple is then we shall have determined what a Christian is.

A disciple is by definition, a learner This indicates thought accompanied by endeavour because it would seem that it would be pointless for one to learn if one did not intend to

adhere to that which had been learned. John records, 'Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed' (John 8:31). Jesus then indicates two fundamental truths concerning discipleship "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:35). Later in the gospel as recorded by John, 'Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples'. Loving and fruitbearing, a testing combination.

It seems to me that if we have love one toward another then we have learned this from the love of Jesus to us and the reciprocation of that love by us to him. Jesus tells us how our love for him would demonstrate itself. 'He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me' (John 14:21). As if to reinforce his words he uses the negative approach as well, "He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings" (14:24). There we have it, then. If we want to be a disciple of Jesus then we must love him: we shall demonstrate that love by keeping his commandments and words. Then we shall be a Christian, a Christ man.

The Early Christian

Does the Bible, then, tell us how the early christians demonstrated their love for Jesus? Indeed it does, and we can learn from the teaching how we ought to demonstrate our love if we profess the name Christian

- 1 We would give Jesus his proper place. On the Day of Pentecost Peter said to the assembled throng, 'Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified both Lord and Christ' (Acts 2:36) You cannot love Jesus and at the same time relegate him to a lower position than some earthly man. The words of ecclesiastical dignitaries, if not the words of Jesus, are futile and meaningless; and our love for grandiose systems and organisations should not be greater than our love for him.
- 2 We would be willing to abide by his teaching. 'Then they that gladly received his word were baptized And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers' (Acts 2:41,42)

Whenever baptism is mentioned in the N.T. it means 'to dip, plunge, or immerse' in water. The person who really loved Jesus would be willing to submit to this most beautiful ordinance, in true faith and obedience willingly committing himself or herself unreservedly to the Lord. It is almost superfluous to say that a baby could never do this. Furthermore, the loving disciple would then continue stedfastly in the teaching of the Word, meeting with fellow disciples to break bread, and thanking God in prayer for the deliverance from sin.

- 3 We would realise that Jesus wanted us in His Church and not in some church named after men or systems. In Matt 16:13 18 Jesus acknowledges the confession that he, Jesus, is the Christ the Son of the living God. Upon that confession he tells us that he intends to build his church. It is easy to understand that the church should be named after Him, but men have seen fit to name churches after their fellow men or even geographical locations. Why not the Church of Christ; isn't that what Jesus meant?

Furthermore, why do religious groups teach for doctrine the commandments of men. If christians have decided that immersion in water is right for them, why do they cling to churches that teach and practice something quite different. If christians are exhorted to meet together to partake of the simple meal at the Breaking of Bread every first day of the week, why do they find it necessary to ignore this exhortation or to support ritualistic services which bear little relationship to what is taught in the N.T.

Identification?

Yes. I am saying that the church of Christ is clearly identified in the N.T. I am also saying that those who respond to Jesus in faith and obedience as I have indicated are added to His church which is His body. It seems to me that christians who find themselves meeting with denominational groups should consider their position very seriously indeed. I do not believe that the Church of Christ as it is revealed in the N.T. can, by its nature, cut across many religious groups. I believe that the only way that christians can get sustenance is by being truly joined to the

Head in the Body. for as Paul says. it is from Christ the Head that the "whole body is fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part. making increase in the Body unto the edifying of itself in love" (Eph. 4 16).

How can any christian fulfil that growth when isolated in some religious group that is teaching and practicing things other than what Christ and His Apostles taught?

Next month we will look at the latter part of the question and consider the relationship between baptism and the Church.

(All questions please to brother Alf Marsden, 377 Billinge Road, Highfield, Wigan).

"THE CHRISTIAN'S ARMOUR" (SECOND AND FINAL PART)

IT is little wonder that the Christian is exhorted to "fight the good fight of faith", in order to 'lay hold on eternal life" (1 Tim. 6:12). Likewise, it is no wonder that we require armour in order to protect us in this fight. Paul proceeds to tell us what that armour is. How important it is that the Christian should know what that armour is which Paul introduces in verse 13 in the words "Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God that ye may be able to withstand when things are at their worst, and having completed every task still stand".

The Belt

Verse 14 "Stand, therefore, having your loins girt about with truth". (Fasten on the belt of truth (N.E.B.)) This reminds us of the story of Jeremiah (chapter 13) and the linen girdle which God had told him to buy and put round his waist. God then told Jeremiah to go to the river Euphrates and hide the girdle in a hole in the rock. After many days, Jeremiah went back for it and behold it was marred and no good for anything. God said this evil people which refuse to hear my words which walk in the imagination of their hearts and walk after other gods to serve them and to worship them shall even be as this girdle which is good for nothing. For just as a girdle is bound close to a man's waist; so I bound all Israel and all Judah to myself, says the Lord so that they should become my people to win a name for me and praise and glory, but they did not listen". And so we see that to have our loins girt about with the truth means listening to God's word, reverencing God's word, and obeying God's word in order that we might remain children of God. Truly a very important price of the Christian's armour.

The Breast Plate or Coat of Mail

Verse 14 "And having on the breastplate of righteousness" ("For coat of mail put on integrity" (N.E.B.)) Isaiah 59 16-17 tells us that our Lord had a breastplate of righteousness (integrity as a coat of mail N.E.B.). "And the Lord saw there was no man and wondered that there was no man to help and was outraged that no one intervened, so His own arm brought Him victory and His own righteousness sustained Him. For He put our righteousness as a breastplate (coat of mail) and an helmet of salvation upon His head".

Paul in 1 Thess 5:8 gives us a similar version when he says, "Let us who are of the day be sober putting on the breastplate of faith and love (armoured with faith and love for coat of mail N.E.B.) and for an helmet the hope of salvation". And so we see that the breastplate of righteousness is faith and trust in God leading to right living or integrity and so to love which is the sum of all our living. Faith and love were the Main characteristics of our Lord's whole life—so should they be of ours.

The Footwear

Verse 15 "Having your feet shod with the puporation of the gospel of peace" (Let the shoes on your feet be the gospel of peace, to give you firm footing N.E.B.). In chapter 52:7 Isaiah says 'How beautiful are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good" In Romans 10:15 Paul says, "How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace and bring glad tidings of good things".

And so we see what Christian shoes are for in the Christian armoury. They not only give the Christian a sure foundation but they are the means whereby we may carry the Gospel to others

The Shield

Verse 16 Above all taking the shield of faith wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts (arrows) of the wicked one". John says in his first letter C5:4-5 "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith – who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?

One of the Common devices of the devil is to attack the Christian at his weakest point, and so woo Him away from his faith in God. Only the strong belief in our Lord and the power of His might can save us from such attacks – that is what constitutes the Christian's shield of faith. The weakest point for the Christian is without doubt when he is under great stress, especially in times of illness or sudden bereavement. It is then, that we are likely to think we have been forsaken by God. We forget His promise that He would never forget us nor forsake us, but that He would be with us always even to the end of the world.

But God is not wishful that any should perish. His heart is full of compassion for the afflicted and distressed. Did He not fully show that when He walked this earth in the flesh and the crowds flocked to be healed by His gracious touch. Naturally, we might have wished His journey to have been longer, but it was love that prevented it from being so. Yes, He had to die on the Cross in order to prepare for far better things for those who put their faith and trust in Him. (using their shield of faith). The writer to the Hebrews calls it a rest: "There remaineth a rest to the people of God".

At the moment, we see only half the picture: let us – as the Psalmist says "be wise and understand these things. "Lest we murmur and incur God's righteous anger – For is it not better that we should suffer for a moment or two in this transitory life of ours, in the light of the much larger and exceedingly greater blessings He has gone to prepare for those who have faith in Him.

Paul puts it thus – 'For one light affliction is but for a moment and worketh in us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory: While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Cor. 4.17 18).

The Helmet

Verse 17 "And take the helmet of salvation (take salvation for helmet N.E.B.) In 1 Thess. 5:8, Paul says "Let us who are of the day be sober putting on the breastplate of faith and love and for an helmet the hope of salvation". The reason so many christians have grown cold is because they have lost their helmets – lost sight of the great hope of the christian – the very thing that makes our striving worth while – the hope that if we remain faithful to the end, we shall gain the crown of eternal life. No wonder Paul says "If in this life only we have hope of Christ, we are of all men the most miserable".

In Col. 1:23 Paul says 'be not moved away from the hope of the Gospel which was preached to every creature which is under heaven where of I Paul, am made a minister". In verse 27, he says "Christ in you, the hope of glory". In Romans 6:5 he further emphasises "if we have been buried together in the likeness of His death (as we were when we were immersed) we shall also be raised in the likeness of His resurrection".

Hebrews 6:19 says "which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast".

The Sword

This hope comes to us because of the word of God which tells us these things are so. That is why Paul completes his list of the Christians armour with the words "and take the Sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God.

1 Peter 3:15 says "Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.

What a sword the sword of the spirit is, even the Word of God. Used aright it is a sure defence against the wiles of the wicked one 'Who ever roameth about seeking whom he may devour'. How many Christians have been devoured and fallen away because they have thrown away the only weapon that could save them in their hour of danger.

Summing up this wonderful picture which Paul presents of the Christian armour we see that

- 1 Having our loins girt about with the truth means obedience to God's word.
- 2 Having on the breastplate of righteousness means trusting in God's word.
- 3 Having our feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace means communicating or carrying God's word.
- 4 Taking the shield of faith means belief in God's word.
- 5 Taking the helmet of salvation means hope in God's word.
- 6 Taking the sword of the spirit means using God's word.

And yet with all that armour, we are still incomplete for Paul closes with these significant words 'Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the spirit and watching thereunto with all perseverance.

Yes even with all our armour on, we have to watch and pray. just as our Lord Himself enjoined His disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:38).

Watching and praying are after all two of the soul's greatest defences against falling away against which Paul warns us. It is only by doing so that we can find that strength which comes from God alone and by which alone we can fight the good fight of faith.

Prayer to God puts God on our side in this fight and if God be for us, who can be against us (Romans 8:31). Keeping our armour on, combined with prayer to God and love in our hearts is our only hope in this present evil world, if we are to stand and not fall.

Let the prayer of each one of us be that with God's help and His armour we shall fight the good fight of faith and so lay hold on eternal life and that by His strength we may be able to stand before Him on that great day and hear from Him these precious words.

Enter thou into the joy of Thy Lord.

W BROWN, Dunfermline.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

NOVEMBER 1975

2—Zech. 6	Revelation 6
9—Ezekiel 9	Revelation 7
16—Exodus 9:22-35	Revelation 8
23—Joel 2:1-18	Revelation 9
30—Jeremiah 15:19-21	Revelation 10

HISTORY

WHEN we consider the words "Things which must shortly come to pass" (1:1) and "which shall come to pass hereafter (1:19), we know that history has by now recorded all or at least some of those things prophesied in our readings. So far as messages to the seven churches are concerned no explanation is needed. Each message speaks for itself, and while it may have historical aspects as some do think, the main messages are applicable to all churches for all time.

We will take a careful look at some history. Jesus of course lived under Roman rule. Of all empires Rome lasted the longest and has had the biggest influence on world history. It was a civilising influence, and the impact of Christ's teachings upon it account largely for this.

The story of persecution administered or allowed on the earliest days of the church until about 311 A.D. is horrible with fearful torture and brutal cruelty. Then however a change equivalent to a revolution took place. The Emperor Constantine decreed in 319 that Christians should be tolerated; in 321 A.D. he decreed that the first day of the week (Sunday) the Christians holy day, should be observed as a day of rest from trade and labour. In 325 AD gladiatorial shows were abolished. In 331 pagan religion should be finished and pagan temples used as churches or destroyed. We must try to realise that this change took place only after nearly 300 years of persecution endured with such faith and fortitude as to defeat opposition from government and people. The power of God in the gospel so changed the whole life

and outlook of countless thousands of ordinary people that they bore without resentment ostracism, torture, imprisonment and execution. It is recorded that in one spate of persecution 700,000 people were murdered for their faith in one province of the empire alone.

About 100 A.D. after disastrously wicked rulers had cursed the state such as Nero and Tiberias. a family originating in Crete came into power. The first was Nerva introducing more humane rule. He adopted Trajan as his successor, who was probably one of the leading army generals when John wrote. A period of unexampled victory and prosperity developed and he extended Roman rule to its very widest - from the Indian ocean to Cornwall. some areas completely and some partially conquered. This lasted until about 190 A.D. when a struggle for mastery among the military leaders began and lasted for 100 years. Rival armies ravaged the empire with civil war, bringing misery, uncertainty to the common people with famine and disease. Gibbon the historian (a sceptic) records that between 250 and 268 A.D. "the furious plague raged without interruption everywhere in the empire".

The empire recovered from the civil conflict under several capable emperors including finally Diocletian who celebrated "pacification of the empire" in 303. This began a reign of terror for Christians. He held with the long established heathen religions and determined to stamp out Christianity. For about ten years the might of Rome was exercised without mercy to destroy Christ's name and people. The leaders were first taken for punishment and then every professing believer. Copies of the Scriptures were collected searched out and burned, and those holding them put to death

It is not surprising that as time passed the enemies of the empire increased, and trouble developed along the borders and elsewhere. The first invasion took place about 409 A.D. with barbarians from the north of Europe led by Alaric, king of the Goths. They sacked Rome in 410 and ravaged a third of the territory, robbing, murdering, destroying as they went. Alaric died and some returned home, others settled and adopted the religion and culture. Tribes, mainly Vandals again invaded the empire from the north. They passed through France annexed Spain, and

thence seized the north African coast and developed piracy in the Mediterranean Sea so as to attack Rome, which they took and pillaged. Their leader died and Rome survived. Wild tribes from central Asia next invaded Europe, crossing the Danube and Rhine rivers, pillaging as they went with pitiless cruelty. Led by Attila the Hun they defeated Roman defence and were only kept from the citadel itself by clever diplomacy.

The empire disintegrating finally fell before Odoacer in 476 A.D. It had been divided with sometimes three emperors at once. one ruling from Rome one from Constantinople, and the religion of Christ is supposedly upheld had been degraded into a "state religion" without real holiness and consecration. However there certainly remained a remnant of faithful Christians. Kingdoms arising from the disrupted empire held to a form of Christian faith and the mixture of races due to the several invasions developed civilisation over the whole of Europe. A state based on Constantinople nominally Christian but even further in apostasy from a moral standpoint survived.

We pass not to a much later date 609 A.D. Mahomet began his work at this date and in 632 the Saracens came out of Arabia in large numbers and invaded Palestine, took Damascus and Jerusalem. They were religious fanatics with faith based upon the Koran. They all rode on horses. Their policy was to fight, to vanquish, to enslave, to force their religion on everyone. They overran the remains of the empire in Asia Minor, across Northern Africa over to Spain replacing the Bible with the Koran. Their conquests covered the Mediterranean coasts around from Greece to Spain. Merciless persecution enslaved the peoples for 150 years "five months" (9.5).

From Central Asia in 1057 the Turks having subdued large regions of Asia, gathered east of the Euphrates, crossed the river and invaded again all the regions east and beyond Constantinople into Europe. Their armies were like the Arabs horsemen, and gunpowder was used in attacking towns. Again murder and rapine was inflicted on captive people and fearful massacres took place wherever there was a profession of christianity. In 1453 Constantinople fell and became part of the Turkish Empire. The time taken was 396 years.

Prophecy

We have to leave it to the reader to consider the connections between the various invasions, and the opening of the seals and the blasts of the trumpets. It is not possible to go into details. I have used "A vision of the Ages" by B.W. Johnson. and "The War with Satan" by B.F.C. Atkinson for the history. and a detailed study of the symbolism will repay the reader. We hope to consider next month the passages which speak of the heavenly scenes, so different from the earthly troubles and sufferings of humanity, which history records, and which remain with us in large measure today. The God of this world is still blinding the eyes of the unbelieving, and leading them to put trust in the ability of man to control satisfactorily his own destiny. In spite of apostasy the healing influence of the Man of Nazareth has produced all that is good in society, and yet the majority "will not have this Man to rule over us" (Luke 19:14).

R.B. SCOTT

"TOO MANY IRONS IN THE FIRE"

By J.K. Martin, in *Australian Christian* 1935

(Abridged)

IT seems as though here is a danger of Christians serving on too many committees, charitable organisations, lodges, civic committees, etc., which absorb our time and talent and stealthily rob us of time and interest in the spiritual meetings of the church.

The church is the greatest and grandest institution in the world, and its place calls for us to give it that supreme position, because of Christ, the Head of the church, who is Lord of our life.

It may be that the church is absorbed by organisation and machinery instead of the leading of the Holy Spirit in the individual life of Christians.

We must sooner or later curtail the organisations and meetings of our church life or take some of our irons out of the fire, or cease to sing.

"I love thy church, O God,
Her walls before thee stand;
Dear as the apple of thine eye,
And given on thy hand".

THANKS

Grateful thanks for £10 for Bibles in Malawi.
Jim Grant. Wallacestone.

NEWS FROM THE CHURCHES

Kentish Town We record with joy the baptism of Jan Williamson on Wednesday. August 13th. She was brought to her decision by the influence and behaviour of Christian companions praise the Lord!

Anniversary and mission October 4th to 19th, with Bro. Wm. B. Murrell. R B SCOTT

OBITUARY

Tunbridge Wells (Cambrian Road). In the early hours of August 2nd our beloved sister Gertrude Hill died, aged 92. Bro. Albert Winstanley conducted a service in our meeting place, and afterward at the graveside August 8th. We give thanks for this faithful life now in the safe keeping of our heavenly Father. Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord' Amen.

AN APPRECIATION

Though feeling inadequate to do so I would like to write an appreciation of sister Hill. Her husband the late A.C. Hill of Leicester left in the 30s to work as an evangelist in the S.E. of England. His premature death at 56 was a great shock and a continuing sorrow for our sister. Her faith and trust in her saviour however remained firm and true to the end of her long life. Her great interest in life was in temperance work amongst women, and in this connection she had many good friends and associations. My own connection with her started in 1957 when I moved to labour with the church here in Tunbridge Wells. She was a 'regular' at the meetings and even in growing infirmity over recent months would set an example to us all of being in her place on the Lord's Day. The last time she met with the church was just seven weeks before she died. Many who were not Christians were amazed at her determination to be at the meetings. My life has been touched by hers many times, especially when the going was rough and perilous. I am a better Christian today because of her example and life which really was a sermon in action. Derek L. Daniell.

COMING EVENTS

Bristol, Bedminster: St. John's Lane.

SPECIAL MISSION

October 4th to October 9th

Sat. and Sun. 6.30 p.m.

Mon., Tues., Wed., Thurs. 7.30 p.m.

Brother Le. Morgan will be the speaker.

A warm welcome will be given to all who can come and join us. L. DANIELL

Blackburn, New Wellington Street,

Gospel Mission from Oct. 25th to Nov. 2nd.

Speaker: Bro. L. Daniell (Bristol).

Meetings:

Sat. 25th Oct. Tea 6p.m. Meeting 7.30p.m.

Sun. 26th Oct. Meeting 6p.m.

Tues., Wed., Thurs., Sat., 7.30 p.m.

Sun. 2nd Nov. 6p.m.

Refreshments on Saturday Meetings.

ALL WELCOME T. Tyson (Sec.)

Kentish Town : 104th Anniversary Meetings

October 4th and 5th. Mission with Bro. W.

Murrell for two weeks. Visitors welcome as usual. R.B. Scott

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