

The SCRIPTURE STANDARD

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

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REALLY BAD LANGUAGE

Bad language is well entrenched in society today and, more than ever, one hears it in the office (not only from the men but from the typists): in the factory, on the T.V. and even on the radio, on public transport, and, sadly, even in school playgrounds. At one time, a passenger using foul language on a bus could have been ejected but now the suggestion would be laughed at. Also at one time, someone who had inadvertently taken the Lord's name in vain, or used a profanity, might well have apologised for it, but again, that is very unlikely today. In the Bible there was a crime of blasphemy, and it carried the death penalty, but one rarely hears the word mentioned today. Whatever happened to the sin of blasphemy? Not all foul language is blasphemy, of course. It had to be bad language of a very specific kind. The subject is certainly rarely mentioned today, even from the pulpits, and I suppose that until Salmon Rushdie was sentenced to death for allegedly blaspheming the Islamic religion, many members of the public had never really heard of it.

"Blasphemy" comes from **blapto** - to injure: and **pheme** meaning speech: and means "injurious speech" or defamation. It can include evil speech against anything or anyone, but is usually restricted in application to deity. A broad definition would be, "To speak of the Supreme Being in terms of impious irreverence, to revile, to speak reproachfully of God, of his titles, attributes, ordinances, word or works." Cruden defines it "To revile or curse God, or the king who was God's representative. It means intentional indignity offered to God or sacred things".

From that definition we can see that God is subjected to blasphemy every day of the week, but obviously it is a matter of degree. How culpable, vile, evil and irreverent must our speech be to constitute blasphemy? In the O.T. (and indeed the early days of the N.T.) blasphemy carried the death penalty and was, therefore, regarded as one of the worst crimes possible. It should not be confused with taking the Lord's name in vain. To curse and swear, and utter profanities, is not, it seems, necessarily blasphemy. In Ex. 20:7 we read, "**Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain,**" God said that He would not hold such a person guiltless, but that seems a far cry from a death sentence. Nor should we confuse blasphemy with *heresy* (although there may be elements in common) because even in the N.T. the heretic is "**after the first and second admonition to be rejected**" (Titus 3:10) and this, again, seems a long way short of a death sentence. One also might imagine that when an atheist denies the existence of God that that must surely constitute blasphemy, yet it seems very doubtful. The Psalmist (14:1) remarks that "**The fool hath said in his heart there is no God**" and so classifies the atheist as "a fool," and not a blasphemer: and not worthy of instant death.

BLASPHEMY IN THE O.T.

Nothing beats an illustration or two, and perhaps we can learn from one or two examples in the O.T. just what kind of injurious speech against God, came to be regarded as blasphemous.

The very first mention we have of blasphemy (Lev. 24:10) involves the son of an Israelitish woman (and an Egyptian father) who got into an angry dispute with an Israelite and, it seems, came to blows. During the quarrel this man "**Blasphemed the name of the Lord and cursed**" and was arrested and locked up. Moses did not seem to know quite what to do in the circumstances, but God interposed and instructed that the death penalty must be implemented in any such case. From this we can assume, perhaps, that this was *the first* instance of such a sin. God further commanded Moses that the whole congregation should stone the man to death, adding, "**Whosoever curseth his God shall bear his sin. And he that blasphemeth the name of the Lord shall surely be put to death.**" This does not tell us what the nameless man said but obviously it must have been very seriously evil and involved cursing God. God must receive our respect, not to say, our reverence, and quite often He does not receive it from us. To flick through the many references in the O.T. to blasphemy makes us quickly aware that this sin was prominent in Israel amongst the many others. God could say, ". . . and My name continually every day is blasphemed" (Isa. 52:5), and Isaiah also records, "**Your iniquities, and the iniquities of your fathers together, saith the Lord, which have burned incense upon the mountains, and blasphemed Me upon the hills: therefore will I measure your former work into your bosom.**" Idolatry, mentioned here, clearly involved blasphemy.

In 2 Kings (19:6-22) we have an instance which does throw some light upon the actual nature of the blasphemy and the words spoken. It also shows that blasphemy can be written (as in a letter). This involved the siege of Jerusalem by Sennacherib, the King of Assyria. Sennacherib had a vast army and those inside Jerusalem, King Hezekiah and the Israelites, were very dismayed and fearful. Sennacherib taunted the Israelites who stood upon the walls of the city and called upon them to surrender. He recounts his previous victories over many nations and attributes his success mainly to the superiority of his gods over all other gods. In the process he belittled the God of the Israelites and called their faith, trust misplaced. He called upon the Jews to abandon Hezekiah and save their own skins urging that they "**hearken not unto Hezekiah when he persuadeth you, saying, The Lord will deliver us. Where are the gods of Hamath, and of Arpad? where are the gods of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivah? have they delivered Samaria out of my hand?**" And thus Sennacherib classified God with all these heathen 'deities' and reviled Him. He also sent a letter in similar terms. Hezekiah, having read the letter placed it upon the altar in the temple asking God to read it: to open His eyes and ears and note "**the reproach**" upon the living God. And so *the blasphemy* by Sennacherib consisted of insults, accusations of impotency, contempt, dismissal and general vilification of God by voice and pen.

REFERENCES IN THE N.T.

We encounter references to blasphemy early on in the N.T. and these formed the substance of a charge against Jesus. Luke describes the Lord's cure of the palsied man and the wonderful initiative of the man's friends in removing tiles from off the roof in order to reach Jesus. (Luke 5:19-24). Christ marvelled at their faith and cured the man: adding, "**Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.**" The Scribes and the Pharisees immediately construed this to be blasphemy and asked, "**Who is this which speaketh blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?**" Another similar and well-known instance, again involving Jesus, was when Christ was being examined by Caiaphas, and the Sanhedrin, prior to the trial before Pilate. In being adjured to say whether He was the Christ or not, Jesus replied, "**Thou hast said, nevertheless, I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.**" "**Then the High Priest rent his clothes saying, He hath spoken blasphemy, what further need have we of witnesses? Behold now ye have heard His blasphemy.**" (Matt. 26:65). These two examples illustrate, perhaps, the kind of language which, to the Jews, would constitute blasphemy. Jesus had claimed equality with God, and authority to forgive sins. I suppose the Jews rightly regarded such claims as blasphemous in the ordinary course of events, but failed, of

course, even with the evidence of the miracles before their very eyes, to recognise that Jesus was the Messiah: that He was the Son of God and did have authority, and power, to forgive sins.

On another occasion, when one of Christ's miracles could neither be ignored nor gainsayed: (i.e. the casting out of the evil spirit from the man dumb and blind - Matt. 12:22) the Pharisees grudgingly acknowledged the miracle but explained it away by claiming that Jesus cast out devils only because he Himself, was in league with Beelzebub, the prince of demons. This was, of course, a dreadful accusation and drew from the lips of Jesus the fact that it was not only a most heinous blasphemy against Himself, but also a blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. He also added that while it was possible to be forgiven by God for a blasphemy, or sin, against himself, it was quite impossible to be forgiven for blasphemy against the Holy Spirit: "No; neither in this world, and neither in the world to come." Clearly it is just possible to blaspheme Christ today as ever it was, and recently we have seen Him pilloried in films and accused of having been a homosexual etc., but it should certainly exercise the human mind as to whether, at the same time *the Holy Spirit is also being blasphemed*, for such, there will never be forgiveness.

Stephen was also falsely charged with blasphemy by the synagogue of the Libertines, Cyrenians, etc., who apprehended Stephen and placed him on trial facing the following charge: "This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law: for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the custom which Moses delivered us." (Acts 6:13). Once again we notice the important ingredient in blasphemy: i.e. injurious speech ("we heard him say"). This defamatory speech is, apparently, similar to that wrung from early Christians by Paul when he forced them to recant, when he was engaged in the persecution of the church. He himself said, "And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme" (Acts 26:11). Whether Paul tortured his prisoners to force them to blaspheme, we are not told, but it was something which seemed to haunt him for a long time afterwards, even though he was forgiven. Later in describing God's wonderful grace towards him, he could say with regard to his former conduct. "who was before a blasphemer, and a persecuter, and injurious: but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief." (1 Tim. 1:13).

Space restricts mention of many other references to blasphemy in the N.T. but before leaving the theme it might surprise us to know that blasphemy was one of the sins the Christians at Colosse were urged to put off. "Put off these," said Paul, "anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, and filthy communication out of your mouth" (Col. 3:8). Paul also "delivered unto Satan" both Hymenaeus and Alexander "that they might learn not to blaspheme." (1 Tim. 1:20).

SINCE N.T. TIMES

As we can imagine, great changes in men's attitudes to blasphemy have taken place since N.T. times (notwithstanding the Islamic death sentence for those who 'blaspheme' that religion) and certainly there seems to be no evidence of the apostles calling for any death penalty, albeit they mention blasphemy many times. However, during the Middle Ages Ecclesiastical Courts tried many blasphemy cases and many a poor wretch was burned at the stake (just as many innocent people were burned as witches). I believe the last burnings took place in 1612. These Ecclesiastical Courts had to differentiate between heresy and blasphemy, and anyone simply holding an unorthodox religious view could quite easily have it construed as blasphemy, and pay the consequences. After the Star Chamber, and Court of High Commission, the ordinary King's Bench took over and blasphemy was answerable at Common Law. Numerous test cases since then have occurred and the Law has evolved into what it is today. In *the Taylor's case* (1675) the offensive words were "the Protestant Religion is a cheat" and this blasphemy was regarded as "a crime against the State, and the Law" and "subversive to good government." Part of Taylor's punishment was to stand in a

pillory in Westminster Palace with a placard on his head "for blasphemous words tending to the subversion of good government." In 1728 Lord Raymond said that judges would not meddle with any difference of religious opinion but would only interfere "where the very root of Christianity was struck at," and Lord Mansfield in a case in 1762 said, "The common law of England knows no prosecution for mere opinions." Mr. Justice Erskine (Shore v. Wilson 1842) ruled that "It is still blasphemy, punishable at common law, scoffingly or irreverently to ridicule or impugn the doctrine of the Christian faith, yet any man may, without subjecting himself to any penal consequences, soberly and reverently examine and question the truth of those doctrines which have been essential to it." Lord Coleridge, in two cases of alleged blasphemy declared "that it is no longer true to say that Christianity is part of the law of the land, and if the decencies of controversy are observed, even the fundamentals of religion may be attacked without a person being guilty of blasphemous libel." He was followed by Judge J. Phillimore who said, in the Boulter case (1908). "A man is free to speak and to teach what he pleases as to religious matters, though not as morals, but if, for the sake of argument, he were to make a scurrilous attack on doctrines which the majority of people hold to be true in a public place where passers-by may have their ears offended, or where young persons may come, he certainly will himself liable to the law of the blasphemous libel.

The House of Lords (in the *Bowman v. Secular Soc. Ltd.* 1917) said that "assuming the objects of the defendants to involve a denial of Christianity, they were not criminal inasmuch as the propagation of anti-Christian doctrines, apart from scurrility or profanity, did not constitute the offence of blasphemy." These are just a selected handful of a great many other legal pronouncements on the subject over many hundreds of years which show *the gradual change in attitude* toward blasphemy, and how the common law perception of what was once a heinous crime has been greatly modified. One wonders what would have to be said, today, and how awful the words would have to be, to bring men before the courts on a charge of blasphemy. In Scotland, the penalty for blasphemy was death, but by an Act of 1825 (amended in 1837) the penalty was changed to a fine, or imprisonment, or both.

A LESSON

How then can we make a brief summary of this subject? We have seen that blasphemy was not unknown amongst the churches in N.T. times, that exhortations against it were delivered and that Hymenaeus and Alexander were given to Satan that they might learn not to do it. However, Paul's main pre-occupation with it seems to have been that the Church can be, and often is, blasphemed because of our behaviour, and this surely is the lesson which emerges.

We have, lately, seen how the indiscretions of a R.C. Bishop (in absconding with one lady and being the literal father of the 15 year old son of another lady) have reflected very badly upon the R.C. Church, and Paul exhorts N.T. Christians to make sure that their conduct never reflects badly on *the Lord's Church* i.e. in attracting ridicule and blasphemy; and *this is the kind of blasphemy* most likely to be encountered today. For instance, Paul calls upon those in the service of a master to honour such masters and do well, "that the name of God and His doctrine be not blasphemed." (1 Tim. 6:1). Similarly he exhorted the young women, "to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good obedient to their husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed." Paul probably remembered Nathan's words to David, "Howbeit because of this thy deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme." (2 Sam. 12:14). This was the unexpected by-product of David's actions, and I suppose, at one time or another, our speech or actions may have given great occasion for the enemies of Christ to blaspheme His name, and cast a reproach upon His Church. This possibility is ever present, and something to keep in mind.

This is language which is really bad.

GLEANINGS

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

UNSEARCHABLE RICHES

A TEXT

"Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ;"
Ephesians 3:8

WHAT DOES IT MEAN ?

"The riches are '*Unsearchable*,' Not traced out, untrackable, continually finding, never exhausting, 'beyond all knowledge and all thought.'"

PAUL SAID

"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how searchable are His judgements, and his ways past finding out!"
Romans 11:33

THE BIBLE SPEAKS

"The riches of His goodness."	Romans 2:4
"Vessels of Mercy."	Romans 9:20-33
"According to the riches of His grace."	Ephesians 1:7
"The exceeding riches of His grace."	Ephesians 2:7
"That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory."	Ephesians 3:16
"But my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus,"	Philippians 4:19
"Christ in you, the hope of glory."	Colossians 1:27

"Here, then, my brethren, are the '*unsearchable riches*' of Christ - riches of love, riches of pardon, riches of comfort, riches of health, riches for restoring the sin-scorched wastes of the soul, riches for transfiguring the sullenness of sorrow and pain, and riches for healthily adjusting the perverted relationships of the home, the state and the race. These riches are ours. Every soul is heir to the vast inheritance! The riches are waiting for the claimants!"
J. H. JOWETT.

WISE WORDS

"The flowers appear on the earth, and the time of the singing of birds is come! Beautiful! and it is all mine and all yours. Over yonder is the sea - it is ours; this ringlet of mighty hills - ours; these trees, these dales, apparelled in their spring attire - ours. The whole of this magnificence - ours, because we have eyes to see it and souls to appreciate it and minds to appropriate it,

We are partners not only in a worm-eaten stock of fancy rubbish, but in this! A God-given inheritance. Come up here to say your prayers, Jack, and to sing your Te Deum, as I do."

from W. RILEY.

A VERSE

"Nor silver nor gold hath obtained my redemption,
No riches of earth could have saved my poor soul;
The blood of the Cross is my only foundation,
The death of my Saviour now maketh me whole."

A CHORUS

"I am redeemed, but not with silver,
I am bought, but not with gold;
Bought with a price - the blood of Jesus,
Precious price of love untold."

"The blood of Christ can wash out blasphemy, adultery, fornication, lying, slander, perjury, theft, murder. Though thou hast raked in the very kernels of hell, yet if thou wilt come to Christ and ask mercy He will absolve thee from all sin."

C. H. SPURGEON

SOMEONE HAS SAID

"Who chides the servant for taking away the first course at a feast, when the second consists of far greater delicacies."

GLEANINGS

"In idleness alone is there perpetual despair."

CARLYLE

Let us then turn to 'the book' and search - find - explore.

Selected by LEONARD MORGAN

CHRISTIAN FREEDOM

This article concerns a perennial problem in the Christian life; the responsible use of Christian freedom. Certainly we do not wish to deny the biblical teaching on Christian freedom. Instead, our interest is in promoting and cherishing it. However, we must encourage a mature, spiritual and responsible practice of freedom. Otherwise, we devalue the grace of God and make freedom a license for sin. The consequence of "cheap grace" is personal bondage to sin. Frankly, many Christians are being enslaved again to those same spiritual forces from which they were formerly delivered. Perhaps this discussion will promote a critical and discerning re-examination of Christian freedom.

Jesus shares an abundant life with His disciples (John 10:10). This life is characterised by **"righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit"** (Rom. 14:17). Moreover, it is a life of freedom! In Christ, we are free from sin and death (Rom. 8:1-4), free from every vestige of **"legal righteousness"** (Rom. 10:4; Gal. 5:1,2), even free to become children of God (John 1:12,13; 1 John 3:1-3). A new life has been opened for us through the death and resurrection of Jesus. This new life contains within itself unlimited possibilities. One may experience an inner-transformation through the Holy Spirit into the image of Christ (2 Cor. 3:17,18). The abundant life is "life on a higher plane."

THE CHALLENGE

The challenge, therefore is to learn to live as a free person in Christ. Those who strive for political or moral freedom while remaining in the flesh find themselves enslaved to their own passions and weaknesses. But if Christ sets one free, he is truly free (John 8:36).

The apostles recognised the temptations inherent in Christian freedom. **"Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?"** Paul asked the Romans (6:1). He addressed the Galatians on this same subject: **"For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another"** (5:13). Paul recognised a continuing struggle in the Christian life between the flesh and the Spirit (Gal. 5:17). Furthermore, he saw how the fleshly nature might possibly use Christian freedom to renew its deadly work.

Peter likewise expressed concern over this same possibility: **"Live as free men, yet without using your freedom as a pretext for evil, but live as servants of God"** (1 Peter 2:16). Both Paul and Peter echoed Jesus' teaching on moral or spiritual freedom. The Lord had told a parable about a person who had demons exorcised from him only later to be overcome by even more "evil spirits" (Luke 11:24-26). Eternal vigilance is the price of freedom. Whenever one fails to sow to the Spirit, the flesh sows its own seed.

Consequently, it takes maturity to live as a free person. **"Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; be babes in evil, but in thinking be mature"** (1 Cor. 14:20). This admonition applies to every Christian who is attempting to live the Christian life. We are to be wise as serpents, although as innocent as doves (Matt. 10:16). Furthermore, we are to

develop a discerning spirit whereby we can distinguish between good and evil (Heb. 5:14). Perhaps the old saying "practice makes perfect" is relevant to the preservation of freedom: **"Do not quench the Spirit, do not despise prophesying, but test everything; hold fast what is good, abstain from every form of evil"** (1 Thess. 5:19-22).

THE DANGERS

Admittedly, everyone perceives the threat to freedom from a different stance. Yet, we each recognise the encroachment on our liberties in the following areas:

Cheap grace. This is the temptation to use the grace of God as an excuse for our sins rather than as the power to deliver us from them (Titus 2:11-14). We are never free to sin (Rom. 6:1).

Moral compromises. It is tempting to allow the world to determine our values rather than subjecting them to the Lordship of Christ. For instance, when we accepted temperance rather than prohibition as the scriptural teaching regarding alcohol, many allowed themselves to be squeezed into the world's mould in their use of it. We may or may not feel the freedom to use "dinner wine" but we are not free to conform to the world (Rom. 12:1). However, our moral compromises are not limited to alcohol. It is apparent in other areas of morality too.

Pleasure syndrome. We are free to enjoy life, knowing that everything God created is good. But we are not free to make pleasure the goal of our lives. The scriptures warn against becoming **"lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God"** (2 Tim. 3:4). Yet many congregations have virtually abandoned a ministry to their communities because their members use all of their available time for their own interests rather than those of Jesus Christ.

Apathy. We have been freed from an institutionalism that posits salvation in the Church. We know that our salvation does not depend on being in the church building every time the doors are opened, notwithstanding Hebrews 10:24,25. Sadly, however, many congregations have stagnated into a "Sunday mornings only" fellowship. They have little or no interest in being together on other occasions. The Church has become an organisation to support financially but not a body in which to invest one's life and talents.

There is only one way to prevent our freedom from degenerating into similar situations. We must build our lives on Christ and learn to live out of His Spirit. Jesus said, **"If you continue in My word, you are truly My disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free"** (John 8: 31,32). Paul expressed it this way: **"If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit"** (Gal. 5:25).

Historically, the Church has responded to abuses of freedom by imposing a form of legalism on its members. Legalism is inadequate. Instead of preserving freedom, it imposes its own form of bondage. It becomes as tyrannical as the abuses themselves. Paul warned against using legalism to safeguard freedom: **"These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting rigour of devotion and self-abasement and severity to the body, but they are of no value in checking the indulgence of the flesh"** (Col. 2:23). We should not impose a cure that is as bad as the illness. Obviously legalism does not promote genuine spirituality. Instead we must confront each other with the Lordship of Christ and help one another walk in the Spirit.

FREE TO SERVE

Moreover, we must come to understand why Jesus set us free. Surely it was for our personal spiritual enrichment! But it also goes deeper than our personal enjoyment. Jesus freed us from sin and death that we might serve God! In other words, our freedom was not given to promote our individuality or independence. We were freed so that **"through love we might be servants of one another"** (Gal. 5:13).

Paul reflected his understanding of Christian freedom in 1 Corinthians 9:10-23 and 19:31-11:1. In the first passage, he explained how his freedom allowed him to serve others by adapting himself to their cultural situation. Still, however, he recognised the Lordship of

Christ in every circumstance. Moreover, he did not use his freedom for himself but for the spiritual interests of others. In fact, as he stated in the second passage, his freedom allowed him to give up "rights" rather than to demand them. "So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offence to Jews or to Greeks or the Church of God, just as I try to please all men in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved. Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ."

Paul shows us how to preserve and protect our freedom in Christ. If we use our freedom for Christ and for others, we will not allow it to dissipate into a cheap platitude. It will remain a liberating and fulfilling quality of life. It will open our lives to God where we shall experience life abundantly.

J. A. RILEY.

BE IMPRESSED!

. . . And be responsible too! The Apostle John wants us to take notice of something marvellous, let the wonder of it sink in. "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God" (John 3:1). We let television impress us, our ears perk up to the incredible, newspapers are good at displaying what catches the eye. So what's so impressive about a name: "*children of God*? It's impressive because it cost so much! Name changes cost. And what a cost to make dead human beings (Eph. 2:1) into living children of God!

Look at *the quality* of God's love in this. A love that puts His Son on the cross when people couldn't have cared less. A love that killed Deity for the sake of humanity. God paid gold to buy some clay! God paid the best to buy beings who didn't deserve the best. That's impressive! Part of the wonder of being called children of God lies in the fact that He keeps right on calling us His children when we don't act like we are. There are days when I don't act much like a grateful child of God, let alone one who's impressed! I treat my family poorly, and that's shameful. I get depressed and low regardless of all the blessings I possess from God's grace; that's inconsistent. Some days I make a poor excuse for a child of God. The wonder about it all is this: God keeps right on viewing me as His child always! Notice "**bestowed**" in 1 John 3:1. This word means God gave it to us once, but it abides with us all the time. Even on bad days.

Read on: "**and such we are.**" It's not just an empty title, "**children of God.**" Be impressed with it because it is real. Real because real blood was shed to make us His children. Real, because a real body rose.

BUT SOMETHING FRUSTRATES US

"For this cause the world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not" (1 John 3:16). We know we are children of God but the world won't believe it. So we have a frustrating identity crisis. God says "and such you are," and the world says "no way!"

Why can't people understand who we are? Why don't more people know about the Church of Christ? How come so many think we are some other religious group that we are not? How frustrating it is to convince the world of our identity, but the world just won't support our claims much. But really, it shouldn't surprise us when the world won't recognise us as God's adopted sons. They wouldn't accept the **real Son** either!

His friends said He was "**beside Himself**" (Mark 3:21). Religious people said He was of the devil (Mark 3:22). They chose to spring a robber out of jail before they would let Jesus out! The Lord didn't get much support from the world. He claimed to be God's Son, yet He looked like any other man. We claim to be God's children, too, but we look like most everyone else. If it wasn't easy for Christ to convince people of his identity, should we expect so much better?

Someday we will be manifested and it will be made clear to all that we are the children of God! (see 1 John 3:2). We are not now in full possession of what God wants to give us as His children. But nevertheless we are still children of God now. Regardless of the world's attitude towards us we are still the children of God. He recognises us for what we are, and that's enough. The world will later. Presently we'll be able to convince some. Jesus was only able to convince some. Later on everyone will recognise Him and us. "It is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that, if he shall be manifested, we shall be like Him: for we shall see Him even as he is."

WE SHALL BE LIKE HIM

We are going to be like Him. John lets us know quickly that at present we are just as much children of God as we will be at Christ's coming. It's just that later on we'll be in full possession of things we can't fully comprehend at this time. We accept and anticipate those future things by faith, yet it is not for us to understand fully right now. What is the situation? We do know He's been glorified and that He has great honour. "God highly exalted Him, and gave Him the name which is above every name . . ." as Paul described Him. We can anticipate glory and honour too.

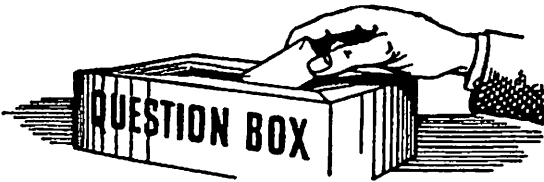
HERE COMES THE RESPONSIBILITY

"And everyone that hath this hope set on him purifieth himself, even as He is pure" (1 John 3:3). The blessing of being a child of God can be abused. The man who doesn't care about purifying his life is inconsistent. Christ is pure. Our ultimate state will be pure. In fact, God now chooses to view His children as pure because of the blood of Christ (Colossians 1:21,22). Working at purity, a life-long process, is consistent with these facts.

Some make a mistake in thinking they are total failures when they err and can't be 100 percent pure. But if we could be 100 percent we wouldn't need Christ. The Lord's system of faith makes room for errors, but not a life of total irresponsibility. God just demands that we be working at purity. It is our work in life to bring our lives more and more into conformity with the way God has chosen to view us: "holy and without blemish before Him." Working at this is responsible and consistent, and I believe we are happiest when we are consistent with ourselves.

Be impressed with who we are: children of God. The world may not understand or agree, but that was the fate of Jesus, too. Because of the blood of Christ, believe that you are God's child. Anticipate what you will be, and be responsible with it.

T. JOHNSON



Conducted by
Alf Marsden

"Was the Holy Spirit working against Himself when Paul in Acts 20:22 said he was 'going bound in the Spirit' to Jerusalem, and when those Christians in Tyre 'through the Spirit' said he shouldn't go?"

This is not an easy question to answer (they never are) and any answer must have a degree of complexity. However, of one thing we can be sure. The Holy Spirit is a Person of the Godhead, therefore we would expect that there would be no confusion in the Godhead regarding any aspect of the salvation of souls, or in any other matter if it comes to that. The Scriptures assert that the three Persons 'agree in one,' therefore there must be some other explanation, and it is here that the complexity begins.

THE OPERATION OF THE SPIRIT

Let us first consider a person to whom the Gospel is being preached. Such a person is not yet the recipient of the in-dwelling Spirit, i.e., he has not yet repented, confessed Christ, and been immersed in water. The Holy Spirit then operates through the word, and such is the

power of the Gospel message that the hearer's spirit is quickened, and he feels an inner compulsion to obey; a dualism of the Holy Spirit and the hearer's spirit, if you will.

This dualism is well attested to in Paul's letter to Rome. Speaking about our adoption into the family of God after we have obeyed the Gospel he says, "**The Spirit Himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.**" 8:16. A point to remember is that we cannot escape the consequences of our responses in our individual spirits.

AUTOMATONS

If a person is defined as an 'automaton' it means that his actions are purely mechanical. If we apply this to our Christian lives, bearing in mind that we have the in-dwelling Spirit, then we might be led to believe that the Spirit would operate through us without any reference to our individual spirits. If that were the case, then the doors of Heaven might as well be opened automatically for all of us, and the Judgment Seat of Christ would be a non-event, because we know that the Holy Spirit would always act accordingly to the will of God. Therefore, I must accept that there is an 'essential me,' and that this 'inner me' can and will respond to stimuli to which it is subjected; the responses will be either Spirit-orientated or flesh-orientated. This will be an indicator of my spirituality.

The above reasoning, if true, leads me to a definite conclusion. Across the Christian experience there must be a wide range of spirituality, and consequently we shall find individual Christians at any point within that range. Some will be just embarking on the road to Christian maturity; others will have reached a point where, for one reason or another, they do not proceed from; some, however, will have progressed to full maturity in Christ. When this happens, the actions of the 'inner me' of each individual Christian will be more or less coincidental with the actions as would be produced by the in-dwelling Holy Spirit. I believe realisation of this prompted Paul to say, "**I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I but Christ liveth in me**" Gal. 2:20.

The foregoing means that every Christian's 'essential I' is in control until his 'self' is completely subjugated and Christ is elevated to be the Lord of his life. It is in every Christian's individual power to '**quench the Spirit,**' i.e., put out the fire. This means that the 'inner me' has taken control again, and having quenched the Spirit, has taken his eternal destiny into his own hands. This *can* be done, and we know *is* done, because God has always granted us the free will to choose. Therefore, we see a law. The Spirit can exert such influence in my life as will make my spirit one with His; I shall then have an inner compulsion to do God's will at all costs. This would also restrain the 'inner me' from taking over again from the Spirit, Paul, knowing the constant conflict between the Spirit and the flesh, put it like this, "**But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection; lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be castaway.**" (1 Cor. 9:27). He obviously subjugated his 'inner me' and let the spirit take over.

I am sorry for having had to bring some psychology into the question, but it seemed the best way to explain what I wanted to say.

SO WHAT'S THE ANSWER?

It seems to me that Paul's own spirit was being inwardly compelled to do God's will; his spirit was 'bound' in this determination. He knew what awaited him because he said, "**the Holy Spirit witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me.**" Every city and town that Paul went into were all giving the same warning, i.e., that prison and persecution awaited him if he went up to Jerusalem.

So what were the Christians at Tyre and Caesarea doing? Well, they were doing what all other Christians had been doing, i.e., beseeching Paul not to go. We must realise here that the Holy Spirit is warning of what *will* happen; it is the Christians who are beseeching him not to go. In 21:13 we see again the measure of Paul's determination, "**Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.**" It is here that

we are brought face to face with what love for Christ means. Some have said that to love the brethren is to love Christ; I would put it the other way round, "to love Christ is to love the brethren." Christ must always predominate in all of our lives, but Paul also had great love for his brethren, and there are echoes of his letter to Philippi, "because I have you in my heart; inasmuch as both in my bonds, and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers of my grace." (Phil. 1:7). Paul knew what he was doing when he was determined to ignore the pleas of the brethren and go to Jerusalem. Later on in Phil. 1 he says, "But I would ye should understand brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel; So that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places." The Gospel of Christ was always paramount in his life.

One of the cardinal facts to emerge from this is that the will of the Lord will always be done, even when it is difficult and dangerous. To their great credit the disciples at Caesarea at length realised this, "And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done." I wonder if Paul's determination was a striking example to the early Church of what being a child of God really entailed. I am sure that the example was not lost on them, and I pray that it will not be lost on us today.

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

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Dec 1	Psalm 26	3 John
Dec 8	Isa. 40:1-11	Mark 1;1-20
Dec 15	Lev.14:1-20	Mark 1:21-45
Dec 22	Psalm 51	Mark 2:1-22
Dec 29	1 Sam. 21	Mark 2:23 to 3:12

JOHN'S THIRD EPISTLE

Author: the apostle John.

Addressed: to Gaius (verse 1).

Key Thought: Christian Hospitality.

Key Text: "We ought therefore to show hospitality to such men so that we may work together for the truth" (verse 8).

Synopsis: The subject matter centres around three characters, Gaius, Diotrephes and Demetrius and some travelling evangelists.

The epistle consists of (1) The Opening Salutation and Good Wishes (1-2); (2) Occasion of Rejoicing (3-4); (3) Appreciation of Help Given to Travelling Teachers (5-8); (4) Diotrephes's Unbrotherly Conduct (9-10); (5) Exhortation (11); (6) Recommendation of Demetrius (12); (7) Personal Notes (13-14); (8) Final Greeting (14).

Verse 2. The convention of wishing one's reader good health at the outset of a letter is one of great antiquity.

Verse 3. Gaius was loyal to Christ and the gospel by which his life was marked. It is interesting to note that Gaius was walking in the truth prior to receiving this letter.

Verse 7. "Devotees of various religions trampled the roads, extolling the virtues of their deity and collecting subscriptions from the public." (C.H. Dodd). The travelling Christian teachers received "no help from the pagans." There is a warning here for us today. The Church should be totally self-financing.

Verses 9-10. This Diotrephes appears to have slandered John, cold-shouldered the travelling teachers and ex-communicated the loyal believers because he loved himself and wanted to have the pre-eminence.

Verse 12. Demetrius could well have been the bearer of the letter.

MARK'S GOSPEL RECORD

This is one of the synoptic gospels. The word synoptic is from the Greek and literally means *to see together*. The other two synoptic gospels are, of course, by Matthew and Luke. There are many parallel passages in these three accounts of Jesus' life and many publications on the

gospels highlight them. I, for example, frequently use the Huck-Lietzmann Synopsis based on the Revised Standard Version.

The writer of this gospel is John Mark. He was the son of Mary, whose house in Jerusalem was a meeting-place for the early Church (Acts 12:12). He was also the nephew of Barnabas and was with him and Paul when he set out on a missionary journey (Acts 12:25; 13:5). However, he separated from this famous team at Perga in Pamphylia to return to Jerusalem. The cause of the split is not revealed by Luke, but it later resulted in a division between Paul and Barnabas themselves (Acts 15:36-41). Later on Mark and Paul were reconciled to each other because Mark is mentioned in three of Paul's "prison" letters (Colossians 4:10; Philemon 24; and 2 Timothy 4:11).

Mark's gospel record is the shortest and simplest of the four. It was written primarily for Gentiles around A.D. 64 to 70. It is believed that much of his material came from the apostle Peter to whom he was particularly close (1 Peter 5:13). Mark is fond of the words "and straightaway," "and immediately;" which occur almost thirty times in his record. Truly his account is bustling with life and is full of action.

Here are some important comments on the gospel of Mark: "The life-setting in which this gospel was published was probably the Emperor Nero's attack on the Christians of Rome in the months following the devastation of that city in A.D. 64" (F.F. Bruce).

"It is directed not to the Jew, but to the Roman world, giving a portrait of Jesus as the powerful Son of God whose word was law in the natural as well as the supernatural realm" (Hodder Bible Handbook). "The gospel was probably written for Gentile readers in general, but particularly for Romans. Old Testament quotations and allusions are relatively few; Aramaic expressions are interpreted; Jewish customs are explained; there are some Latin words. The general tone, depicting the Lord's ceaseless activity and His power over demons, disease and death, is such as

would appeal to Roman readers, whose interest was in deeds rather than words" (G.E. Graham Swift). "Simplicity and conciseness are the characteristics of Mark's gospel . . . it is the shortest and clearest, the most marvellous, and at the same time the most satisfactory history in the whole world" (Thomas H. Horne).

CHAPTER 1:1 TO CHAPTER 3:12

We read in this section of the healing power of Jesus. He heals a man possessed with an evil spirit (1:21-28); Peter's mother-in-law (1:29-31); many who had various diseases or were possessed with demons (1:32-34); a man with leprosy (1:40-45); a paralytic man (2:1-12); and a man with a shrivelled hand (3:1-6). This power of *genuine* healing was to show to the world that this man Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ, the Son of the Living God. We recall the words of Nicodemus to the Master: "**Rabbi, we know you are teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that you do, except God be with him**" (John 3:2). A lot of people today want to have Jesus without His miraculous powers. For some reason they feel embarrassed by them. This position is quite ridiculous. As one writer put it: "I have no intellectual problem with the miracles of Jesus. I would have problems with Jesus if it were not for His miracles. What He did to attest His deity is exactly what I would expect of one who claimed to face a sceptical world as the Son of God."

Leprosy, deformity, paralysis - it did not matter, for Jesus had power over all these diseases. But He came to heal mankind of a far greater disease than any of these. I speak, of course, of SIN. Jesus knows absolutely everything about this disorder, although it has never affected Him. Sin is a universal disease with horrendous consequences. But there is a cure: and Jesus not only provides that cure, but is the cure. I like what Paul wrote: "**This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save (heal) sinners: of whom I am Chief**" (1 Timothy 1:15). To achieve this He had to shed His own life-

blood on Calvary's tree. The apostle John later wrote: ". . . and the blood of Jesus Christ His son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). Thank God for Jesus!

John the Baptist was the forerunner of the Messiah. His coming was the subject of prophecy (Malachi 3:1; Isaiah 40:3). He is one of the great characters of history. It is interesting to note that John never performed any miracles during his ministry, unlike Jesus (John 10:41). John was a powerful preacher in his time, and his characteristics were self-denial, courage, obedience, humility and holiness. His baptism was a "baptism of repentance for the remission of sins" (1:4). Jesus submitted Himself to this baptism (1:9). But why? Matthew records His words: "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfil all righteousness" (3:15, N.I.V.). Edwin Rice has written: "Thus Jesus would not merely make Himself one with His people by this act; and mark His entrance upon His holy mission: He would also fulfil all that was right or pleasing in God's sight, and make himself a servant in submitting to this new sign of the new dispensation."

Jesus soon began to gather a band of men around Him. These were to be His apostles. He chose twelve altogether. We read in this section of the calling of the fishermen Andrew and Peter, James and John, and the tax collector Levi or Matthew. It is interesting to read that the Master chose men from such humble backgrounds and did not seek out the rich and famous of that day. "Jesus chose His staff with wisdom. He chose men who had learned the lessons of life not in an academy or in a seminary, but in the business of living. He chose men whom life had already moulded for His purposes. He chose them, first to be with Him, then to be sent out as his ambassadors to men" (William Barclay). In many ways the apostles are the most extraordinary men the world ever saw. It is no wonder their names are on the twelve foundations of the wall of the eternal city (Revelation 21:14).

IAN S. DAVIDSON,
Motherwell.

TEST YOUR BIBLICAL KNOWLEDGE

1. To whom did Abraham lie about his wife?
2. Name Joseph's parents?
3. Who was Moses' father-in-law?
4. Name the cave where David hid?
5. Who was hanged, and his ten sons after him?
6. Lot fled to this city?
7. This woman was the wife of Herod's steward.
8. This soldier rescued Paul from the Jews of Jerusalem,
9. She was a Jewess and the wife of Felix?
10. Who was the coppersmith who did Paul "much evil"?

APPEAL FOR WORK IN P.N.G.

Dear Brethren,

My son-in-law and daughter Andy and Catherine Scott, are planning to return to their missionary work in Papua New Guinea in January, 1997. Their two younger daughters Rachel and Celina, will return with them and will continue their education by correspondence courses. Andy and Catherine were married in New Guinea and two of the girls were born there, so that is home to them. They returned to America in August, 1993 because of Sara's need to attend an American school, in preparation for University, but like me their hearts are with the work in Papua New Guinea. They have asked me to go back to Papua New Guinea to work with them and I will be very happy to return. I am hoping to get a three year visa and have already completed all the necessary forms for this, including a full medical check up.

Their work is based in the highlands of New Guinea and a long way from the remote Waria Valley on the border of New Guinea and Papua. There is a small congregation in the towns of Goroka and Mt. Hagen and many small village congregations in the Chimbu Province and the

Western Highlands Province. Andy will go where he is most needed, and I am sure that I will find plenty to do wherever we go, teaching women and children the Bible. There is more illiteracy amongst the women in the Highlands than in the Waria Valley, so hopefully I will be able to teach literacy classes to help the Christian women.

I would like to visit the Waria valley from time to time and hope to do this with Velma Forman, the Canadian nurse working in Lae. We will try to take medical supplies and clothing to them as we did before. Velma is presently on leave and returns in November. She is hoping that I may be able to go with her to the Menyama tribe in the Sarawagi mountains. The Church has been planted there and like the Waria people they live in a remote area accessible only by plane to a small airstrip. It is encouraging for the Christians in these areas to know that we care about them.

The Solar power unit installed in the Orouba Church building in April has proved a great boon to the work of the Church there. We have three congregations with buildings in the Waria Valley and three other groups meeting in houses. The Aroba Church are presently constructing a new building and Tom Bunt who visited there this year, bought the corrugated iron for the roof. Tom and Rens worked with us in the Waria Valley for two years in Aroba. I am really glad that Tom has given them that help because I promised to try and raise the funds for a Solar Power unit for their building. We take electric light for granted and cannot imagine using small kerosene lamps. Unfortunately, the brethren are often without kerosene. They are all subsistence farmers as there is no employment for them in the Waria valley.

You may not be able to help this time, and I know that many congregations and individual Christians are already fully committed but if you can help to get light to another Church building in the Waria Valley, it will make the work of teaching and preaching there much easier. If you can assist me to "Go and teach" people

who just emerged from the stone age in the second quarter of this century, I will most grateful. There are so many who are still ignorant of the love of Jesus and the Word of God in Papua New Guinea.

My eldest granddaughter, Sara, is getting married on December, 28th to a young Christian man who is also interested in missionary work. For the past two years Jon has gone with medical teams to British Guyana in South America, during his summer break from College. I thank the Lord for His abundant blessings to me. I will leave for the 'States' on 27th November and come back on 15th January to prepare for my return to Papua New Guinea.

May the Lord bless the work which you are doing to extend His kingdom.

For the Master's cause

RUTH B. COLES

6 Heimdal Gardens, Glenrothes,
Fife. KY7 6TZ.

OBITUARY

Eastwood: We have to report with sadness the passing of our dear Brother Wilfred Wheatley who was called home to the Lord on Friday, 9th August. Though suffering failing health over the past year he managed to maintain his independence in caring for himself right up to the end of a long and faithful life. Wilf was always present at the Lord's Table setting an example in consistency and concern for the well being of the Church.

He was immersed into Christ some sixty years ago, aged twenty-five, and went on to become useful in the Church and a preacher of the word with the congregation then meeting in Burns St., Ilkeston. Along with his son Gary and family he was welcomed into fellowship with the Church at Eastwood over three years ago, proving to be a willing and useful member. We commiserate with Bro. Gary and family in their loss and wish to thank Bro. Bob Eckman for his support in conducting the funeral service with caring love and sympathy.

ROYCE LIMB.

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APPEAL FOR INFORMATION

Mike Casey, a professor at Pepperdine University, is wanting to locate and interview Church members who were conscientious objectors in world wars I & II. Copies of pamphlets, documents, pictures, etc., relating to the CO or war issue are sought. Also needed are the Church journals **Interpreter** (later called **Apostolic Messenger**, and **Biblical Advocate**) and the **Scripture Standard**. His address until April, 1997 is 56 Princes Gate, London. SW7 2PG. Tel. 0171 581 0710.

GHANA APPEAL

Again we sincerely thank those who have contributed to the growth of the Lord's Kingdom in Ghana who are greatly encouraged by your efforts, I have been requested by the brethren in Ghana to write this month's appeal. I think that perhaps the response has been slow since our Ghanaian brethren began writing their own appeal, they feel their reports are not good enough. I will assure them that this is not the case. In the past 7 years I have noted peaks and troughs in the response to articles. We have had some very good responses since our return from Ghana. It would be great to stay on the mountaintop,

but the work is done in the valleys.

Allow me to give you an update on the distribution of the book "Where there is no Doctor." As I write this, every family in 30 congregations have either received or will receive their copy by the time you read this article. There are still 11 congregations to cover. We have sent out 300 copies to date. All clothes, books and glasses received up to September have also been dispatched.

There are still not enough hymn books in Ghana. I feel guilty and ashamed to know that most churches have hymn books lying on shelves not being used (I include my own congregation) when there is a need in Ghana for these books.

It would be easy to say if we just sent our extra old hymn books to Ghana then the problem would be solved. No it wouldn't.

We take for granted the light. You need light to read. The working day appears to finish at 5 p.m. and people seem to eat in the twilight. Churches have their Bible studies at 7 p.m. when it is dark.

Bible study in the dark is an experience. Even with a kerosene lamp it is not easy. Someone has to keep pumping it up to maintain the pressure and at its best the light is poor. I have found a supplier of Solar Power hand lights at £250 each. If each church had one of those I am convinced the Church would really appreciate it.

Our brethren are so happy to know that we are thinking of them. They find this a source of great encouragement.

The most important need in the Church in Ghana at the moment, as far as I am concerned is health education.

In the past 7 years a fairly high proportion of the money we have collected has been spent on medical treatment.

We have also started sending **child to child readers**. These have a double function, they encourage the children to read and share the book with other children. They teach the children to become concerned about **their health** and the health of their brothers and sisters.

The topics that we have begun to distribute cover a wide range of problem

areas such as Dirty Water - is a book which informs children how to recognise and avoid dirty water which they collect for drinking. It tells them how they can clean up their water and easy ways to kill mosquito eggs in the water. Another book deals with how to defeat disease and AIDS is also dealt with. A third book we are sending out deals with accidents in the home and on the road. There are also books to teach the children, in an interesting way how to know when someone has Cholera or Pneumonia. There are books on how to look after someone with a fever, how to prevent death from diarrhoea by prompt action. There is a book dealing solely with disease spread by flies.

These books range from £1.45 to £1.65 each (if bulk purchase I can receive a further 5% discount which is the maximum from a non-profit making organisation - unfortunately these books are subject to a 40% increase at the end of December this year). I believe that if we are going to help the Church to help itself we need to include the children. I want to reassure the readers who have contributed to this Appeal that the money is being well spent and it is very much appreciated.

Please make Cheques payable to "Graeme Pearson (Ghana Appeal)" and send to Graeme Pearson, 13 Fairways, Dunfermline, Fife. KY12 0DU. Tel. (01383) 728624.

P.S. IMB received your cheque (too late to acknowledge in last months issue). Thank you (Receipt No. 765).

NEWS FROM THE CHURCHES

Kentish Town, London. We rejoice that Selina Hussain was baptised into Christ on August 4th and we pray that she will find joy and encouragement as she experiences the love in Christian fellowship.

We had our 125th Anniversary Meeting on Saturday, 12th October, and we would like to thank those who came to share the time of thanksgiving and fellowship. Bro. Jon Glesinger, gave us two messages on fellowship which were encouraging and gave us plenty of "food for thought." We thank him for his services on both Saturday and Sunday.

DOROTHY PROUD, (Secy.)

1. Abimelech (Genesis 20:2).
2. Jacob and Rachel (Genesis 30:22-24).
3. Jethro (Exodus 3:1).
4. Adullam (1 Sam. 22:1).
5. Haman (Esther 7:10; 9:13-14).
6. Zoar (Genesis 19:17-22).
7. Joanna (Luke 8:3).
8. Claudius Lysias (Acts 23:22-26).
9. Drusilla (Acts 24:24).
10. Alexander (2 Tim. 4:14).

ANSWERS

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