

The SCRIPTURE STANDARD

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

VOL. 47. No.12

DECEMBER 1979

THE TWO SONS

In Matt. 21:28-32 we read the following, "But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first and said, Son, go work today in my vine-yard. He answered and said, I will not; but afterward he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go Sir; and went not. Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They said unto Him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, that the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not; but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye when ye had seen it repented not afterward, that ye might believe him."

This little gem of a parable is one which is seldom commented upon and yet how telling the lesson. Like most parables the situation and circumstances are commonplace and every parent has, at some time or other, had a similar response from their children to a request to do something for the parent. The parable was directed to the Chief Priests and Elders of the Jews, of course, but is equally relevant to all of us.

In order to understand the parable we require to remind ourselves of the circumstances which called it forth from the Saviour's lips. The Chief Priests and Elders demanded that Jesus explain to them both the nature of His authority to teach as He did, and the source of it. Jesus promised to answer their question if they would first answer one of His. "The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men?" This was not a 'trick' question because Jesus was not guilty of asking such questions, but it was certainly, like most of His questions, a very penetrating one to men like the Chief Priests. The question would have been easily answered by honest men. Like many politicians the Priests and Elders did not give a straightforward answer but considered first of all, the consequences. If they answered, "From heaven" they knew Jesus would have then have asked, "Why then did ye not believe John". If they said, "From men" they would have incurred the wrath of the people for all regarded John as a prophet. Thus they were on the horns of a dilemma and resorted to the answer many resort to in such circumstances, "We cannot tell". Jesus said, "Neither tell I thee by what authority I do these things." He then went on, (in response to this answer they gave) to tell the parable of the two sons, In passing it might be fruitful to contemplate on the way in which we answer questions — are we as straightforward and honest as we should be, or do we emulate the Priests and Elders somewhat in the use of guile? The question put by Jesus concerning John's

baptism "Was it from heaven or was it the invention of man" is a good question to put today concerning Christ's baptism to those who treat it with indifference or contempt, "Was it from heaven (God) or is it something invented by men?" A good question indeed.

"We cannot tell". The answer should have been, "We will not tell", for they knew that to acknowledge John and his baptism would have necessitated an affirmation of Jesus as well. If John's authority was derived from heaven so was Christ's authority, for John testified that Jesus was the Messiah. John predicted Him, pointed Him out, baptised Him, and came into the world as His forerunner as per the scriptures. However in the parable of the two sons which followed Jesus was about to lead these crafty men to answer their own question and to condemn themselves by the words of their own mouths. When Jesus (and John) had come preaching the coming Kingdom of God the publicans and harlots had refused at first — their initial reaction had been one of hostility and rejection — but later they repented and many had sought entry. The conduct of the Chief Priests and Elders, on the other hand, was one of professed Godliness. They observed the external rites of the Jewish religion, were apparently very Godfearing men but had opposed themselves to the Son of God and were at that very moment planning His destruction. On that basis there was more likelihood of the publicans and the harlots of entering the Kingdom of Heaven than they. It would be difficult to conceive of a greater condemnation to the proud and pious Elders than that. I suppose that basically the situation has not changed much and that even today there is more hope of the openly immoral becoming followers of Christ than those who already regard themselves as religious and righteous — more hope for the street woman than the Rabbi.

In the parable the father made the same request of both sons, "Son go work today in my vineyard." The first son answered, "I will not, but afterward he repented and went." The second son said, "I go sir, but went not".

Jesus does not express approval of the first son in every respect for, after all, he was disobedient and refused to go. The son was openly frank about it but it was disobedience just the same. The harlot is often frank about her occupation but this does not make her any better — frankness can not turn a sin into a virtue. The merit in the first son was, however, that he repented; he changed his mind and more importantly he changed his course of action and went to work in the vineyard. The fault of the second son was not that he said, "I will go Sir" for his pledge of obedience was very commendable but his promise was empty. His purpose in pledging obedience was to secure momentary approval and he either had no real intention of going or had the intention but neglected to keep it. They say that the road to hell is paved with good intentions. Men often make promises just to 'get themselves off the hook' at the time but don't always keep them. God has no pleasure in the default of vows.

The 'father' in the parable is, of course, God and we each are the sons. God says to each man and each woman in this world, "Come, go work today in my vineyard" with emphasis on 'Work', and 'today'. Those, who like the first son are saying to God, "I go not" can only pray that they will yet have opportunity to repent of their obstinate rejection of God's claim upon them and that, in time to come, they will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Those of us whose response is, or was, "I go sir" should perhaps examine our performance of that pledge for Jesus.

Those who have said to Jesus, "I go Sir" have a grave responsibility to see that they have gone, and are still going into the vineyard to work (and should regard it as a privilege). Matthew Henry on this passage says quaintly, "By the sin of Adam we were turned out to work upon the Common, and to eat the herb of the field, but by the grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, we are invited again into the vineyard." Nevertheless the vineyard is a place of work not of relaxation. Heaven, not the

vineyard, will be the place of rest. There is plenty to be done and Christ's servants are intended to be doing it. Too often the work is left to the few and churches wither and die through lack of a sense of direction and energy of purpose. If each church member, male and female, were to work to full capacity in the Lord's vineyard what a transformation there should be. We often promise but seldom perform.

May it be that we shall reflect upon this short but searching little parable and see if our lack of effort in the Lord's vineyard would identify us with the attitude of the second son, the son who said with great alacrity, "I go, Sir" but didn't go.

Editor.

THE SIN OFFERING

Read Lev. 4 and ch. 6 vs. 25-30.

PART I.

We now come to the sin offering of Leviticus 4 and the law thereof in ch. 6. We notice that there is no mention of it being a sweet savour unto the Lord as in the Burnt, Meal and Peace Offerings, for the simple reason that it is a reminder of what sin is and of what sin has done and there is nothing sweet about this but only that which is offensive to God. It was a reminder to God of what it was going to cost Him in the giving of His Son and what it was going to cost the Lord Jesus in terms of blood, sweat and tears; of the sorrows of Gethsemane, of the shame of Gabbatha and of the sufferings of Golgotha; of being forsaken by God and by His own disciples; left alone, 'O Lord to die'. Sin is an affront and a challenge to God's holiness and God met that challenge by the atoning death of the Cross. God is against all sin. All sin is against God! Irrespective of how sin affects us, all sin is contrary to the Divine Law and is against God! Joseph, when tempted by Potiphar's wife could say "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" He knew that this sin was against the woman and against her husband but basically it was against God. David, in Psalm 51, after he had sinned with Bathsheba and engineered the death of her husband to cover up his sin, after being confronted with it, said in confession and repentance before God, "Against Thee and Thee only have I sinned" even although his sins were directed against others. All sin is against God and therefore God must deal with it in judgement. Sin for man brings death, spiritual, physical and eternal, separation from God for ever, for the wages of sin is death.

But God is gracious, tolerant and merciful. Man needs forgiveness because of the guilt of his sin, needs cleansing because of sins defilement and needs deliverance from sin's power. And forgiveness, cleansing and deliverance can be experienced by all who accept God's indictment against us and His verdict about us and come in repentance to the foot of the cross to accept Him Who was made sin for us that we might be right with God and acceptable to Him by virtue of the great sin-offering of our Lord Jesus Christ. Please observe a precious truth stated for us in the law of the sin-offering, Lev. 6 v. 25, which states, 'In the place where the burnt offering is killed, shall the sin offering be killed' bringing them both together into one place. So at the one place called Calvary, the burnt and the sin offering combine in the one supreme sacrifice of the Lord Jesus as indeed do all the other offerings.

But in order to obtain the merit of the offering and the cleansing virtue of the blood, in our acceptance before God, there must be identification with the sacrifice and this is seen in the laying on of the hand on the head of the victim, transferring as it were our guilt to another. It also speaks of our personal appropriation of the death of another on our behalf. We remember that the Lord Jesus identified Himself with us in His life when He became a Man; He took upon Himself our humanity (sin apart). And in His death He identified Himself with our sins and bore them in His

own body on the tree. So we must identify ourselves with Him in His death, as the hymn says 'My faith would lay her hand, On that dear head of Thine; While like a penitent I stand, And there confess my sin'. That is by faith, but there is an outward and practical identification when we believe and are baptised by immersion in obedience to the Gospel.

As we have seen then in the other offerings, in man's approach to God, he needs the sin offering first before he can offer what is represented by the burnt offering. We have seen that after the fall of man in Eden's garden, the first mention of an offering is the sin offering, by Abel, in Gen. 4. We do not read of the burnt offering until we come to Gen. 8, offered by Noah after his experience of salvation, for Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. But in God's approach to man, He requires first the burnt offering before there can be any sin offering; that is, He must find someone who could fulfill the conditions, someone who would qualify, someone of spotless purity and unblemished righteousness, who, if put to the test, would come through unscathed, in absolute perfection. He looked around His heaven among the angelic beings, the cherubim and the seraphim and found none He could trust with this sacred task. For could they not have let Him down, their hearts could be lifted up with pride, as had already happened to some of them and to their very leader and prince, Satan himself, among the fallen angels? He looked among men and could only pronounce "They have all gone out of the way; they have altogether become unprofitable, there is none that doeth good, no, not one". In all His creation there were none that He could trust and in desperation as it were, He could cry, "Whom shall I send and who will go for us" and there was a voice that said, "Here am I, send Me" and it was the voice of the Son of God! And so He became the Babe of Bethlehem, the Boy of Nazareth, the Man of Galilee, tested in all points as we are, and was without sin. It was not only that He did not sin but that He could not sin and was tested in every way to prove this. There was no sin in Him, nothing to respond to temptation for temptation comes from within, James 1 v 14. And where as our fallen human nature so readily responds to sin, He had a perfect human nature, because He was begotten, not by man, but by the Holy Spirit. He was the sinless Son of God, without spot and without blemish, no inward corruption, no outward defilement. And He was the only One Who was then so qualified to take upon Himself this huge task of making perfect and complete atonement and of Whom it could be said, 'He offered Himself without spot to God'.

Now the very fact that so many animal sacrifices had to be offered and so often, proved how inadequate they were. As Hebrews 10 explains, they could never make the offers thereof perfect, for it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins, but this Man (Jesus) after He had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God, thus denoting the completeness of His work and the eternal efficacy of His precious blood. Such is its value that it needs never to be repeated again. He takes away the first that He may establish the second, 'for richer blood has flowed from nobler veins, to purge the soul from guilt and cleanse the reddest stains'. It has been said that the blood of the animal is non-moral blood because it is not subject or responsible to the moral law. The blood of man, begotten by man, is immoral blood; because created in the image and likeness of God, he is responsible to God and his blood is immoral because of the corruption of sin. But the blood of the Lord Jesus is moral blood because it is the blood of a sinless Man. He was not begotten by man. Although He had a perfectly human birth, it was the miraculous conception that proved His identity. He was begotten in the womb of Mary by the Holy Spirit and was not a son of God, but THE Son of God. And that adds the greater value to His sacrifice, superseding all others in fulfilling what they were intended for and so abolishing them.

John D. Hartburn (To be cont.)

GLEANINGS

“Let her glean among the Sheaves.” Ruth 2:15

Effects of kindness

“I am almost convinced that there never yet was an instance in which kindness has been fairly exercised, but that it has subdued the enmity opposed to it. Its first effort may not succeed any more than one shower of rain can reclaim the burning desert; but let it repeatedly shed the dew of its holy influence upon the revengeful soul, and it will soon become beautiful with every flower of tenderness. Let any person put this question to his soul, whether, under any circumstances, he can deliberately resist continued kindness? And a voice of affection will answer, that good is omnipotent in overcoming evil. If the angry and revengeful person would only govern his passions, and light the lamp of affection in his heart, that it might stream out in his features and actions, he would soon discover a wide difference in his communion with the world. The gentle would no longer avoid him; friends would not approach him with a frown; the weak would no longer meet him with dread; children would no longer shrink from him with fear: he would find that kindness wins all by its smiles, giving them confidence and securing their friendship.”

Truth

“Truth, which is mighty, must prevail. Obstacles may be thrown in its way, and may, for a little time, and to some extent, impede its progress, but they cannot entirely obstruct its course. Christianity, as has always been the case, will survive and flourish, when its opponents shall be dead and forgotten. The reason is obvious: it is based on truth, and may be despised, rejected and trodden underfoot, but, “Truth crushed to earth will rise again.” And like the blade of grass, every time that it arises, its strength and beauty will be increased.”

The Bible

“We are so accustomed to the sight of a Bible, that it ceases to be a miracle to us. It is printed just like other books, and so we forget that it is not just like other books. But there is nothing in the world like it, or comparable to it. The sun in the firmament is nothing to it, if it be really what it assumes to be — an actual direct communication from God to man. Take up your Bible with this idea, and look at it and wonder at it. It is a treasure of unspeakable value to you, for it contains a special message of love and tender mercy from God to your soul. Do you wish to converse with God? Open it and read it. And at the same time look to him who speaks to you in it, and ask him to give you an understanding heart, that you may not read in vain, but that the word may be in you as good seed in the ground, bringing forth fruit unto eternal life. Only take care not to separate God from the Bible. Read it in the secret of God’s presence, and receive it from his lips, and feed upon it, and it will be to you as it was to Jeremiah, “the joy and rejoicing of your heart.” The best advice which any one friend can give to another, is to advise him to consult God; and the best turn that any book can do its reader, is to refer him to the Bible.”

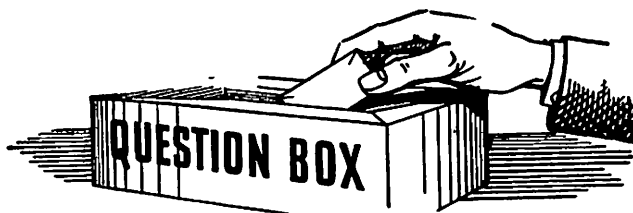
“I am that I am”

“Who ever conceived a more beautiful illustration of this sublime text than the following by Bishop Beveridge:—

He doth not say, I am their light, their guide, their strength, or tower, but only “I am that I am.” He sets his hand as it were to a blank that his people may write under

it what they please, that is good for them. As if he should say, Are they weak? I am strength. Are they poor? I am all riches. Are they in trouble? I am comfort. Are they sick? I am health. Are they dying? I am life. Have they nothing? I am all things. I am wisdom and power. I am justice and mercy. I am grace and goodness. I am glory, beauty, holiness, eminency, supremacy, perfection, all-sufficiency, eternity! Jehovah, I am. Whatever is amiable in itself, or desirable unto them, that I am. Whatsoever is pure and holy; whatsoever is great and pleasant; whatsoever is good and needful to make men happy, that I am."

Articles this month taken from *The Christian Messenger and Family Magazine*, 1845. Selected by Leonard Morgan.



Conducted by
Alf Marsden

"I was reading recently an article which clearly was ignoring the part played by baptism in the rebirth. The writer said that we are saved by the word and that the word is often referred to as having a cleansing effect, e.g., 'Being born again not of corruptible seed but of incorruptible, by the word of God' (1 Pet. 1:23). Similarly, in Eph. 5-26 'that he might sanctify it and cleanse it (the church) with the washing of water by the word.' In James 1:18 we read, 'Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth ...' Also John 15:3 'Now are ye clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.' Can you please comment on this?"

The writer of the article which our Questioner refers to has done what so many other people find it convenient to do; he has taken some quotations from the Bible and presented them as ultimate truth without any reference to or explanation of other scriptures. On the one hand, one has to suppose that the writer genuinely believes what he writes; on the other hand, there may be those who for reasons best known to themselves write such things which are less than truth; in either case, what really suffers is the truth. It behoves every writer to search diligently for the truth and to present nothing less than that; this is a task which I personally am always painfully aware of every time I approach the word of God. This, I feel, the writer referred to has not done. But we shall see as we study the word itself.

I believe that we shall only establish the right relationship between the word and the rebirth and the part that baptism plays if we pursue our objective exclusively from the Bible. I believe it is a matter of:

- (a) Communication.
- (b) The relationship between Jesus and God's word.
- (c) The identification of the Saviour, and
- (d) Obedience to the word.

Communication

The gospel writer John is very explicit about one very important fact, "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him" (John 1:18). Paul wrote with equal conviction that

Jesus Christ "in his time shall shew, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see" (1 Tim. 6:14-16). Furthermore, Jesus made about the only statement of the true nature of God when he said, "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). Consequently, if God had to communicate His message to human beings in the flesh, then He had to enshrine that message in the medium of those to whom it was addressed, and so we find John saying, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). That Jesus was the Word cannot be doubted because we have already quoted John as saying, "the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." That Son, as we well understand was Jesus.

I think we are now in a position to say with reasonable accuracy certain things;

(i) In order to save men, God had to communicate His message to them.

(ii) Being the Eternal Spirit He couldn't be seen Himself by men, so He had to send that message by a Person; that Person was Jesus.

(iii) The communication must inevitably have been in a manner in which human beings could understand it, i.e., in words and action.

The relationship between Jesus and God's word

It seems to me that we have to establish next a direct link between what God would have said in His message, and what in fact Jesus did say when he was here on the earth. When Jesus was with Peter, James, and John on the Mount of Transfiguration, they heard a voice which came out of the clouds and said, "This is my beloved Son: hear him. And suddenly, when they had looked round about, they saw no man any more, save Jesus only with themselves" (John 9:7, 8). This, evidently, was God the Father speaking out of the cloud and stating quite explicitly that Jesus was the one that should be listened to. Realising this, the words of the Lord Himself as recorded by John have a greater impact; I think they should be quoted in full. "He that believeth on me believeth not on me, but on him that sent me. I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness, And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day. For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that his commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak" (John 12: 44-50). If we believe that Jesus is God's son, then any further comment that I could make on that statement would be superfluous.

Furthermore, in John 17 we find the recorded prayer of Jesus to his Father, and in that prayer Jesus says, "For I have given unto them (the disciples) the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me" (John 17:8). So the disciples believed Jesus to be God's Son; they believed his words, which we have seen were God's words; in fact they *were* disciples *because* they believed everything about Jesus. We shall see later what believing Jesus really means.

Yes, not only was there a direct *link* between what God would have said and what Jesus *did* say, but there was and is a direct *unity* in the Godhead; as Paul said, "For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (Coll. 2:9).

The identification of the Saviour

It is true to say that the word is said to cleanse, to sanctify, and to give instruction in righteousness; it is also true to say that it is the incorruptible seed, but one must never try to separate the message from the Messenger. The word and the Word are inseparable. The word cleanses because Christ cleanses; the word sanctifies because Christ sanctifies; the word is the incorruptible seed because Jesus was incorruptible. It is absolutely certain that Jesus is the Saviour; the gospel is that word which tells of Jesus," "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:23).

Take, for example, the words of Peter. When some of the disciples ceased to follow Jesus because the way was hard, Jesus said to the twelve, "Will ye also go away?" Then Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life" (John 6:68). The same Peter testified to his Lord after Jesus had ascended into heaven, and said, "This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:11, 12).

In identifying the Saviour we also identify life in the re-birth. Jesus said unto Nicodemus, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5). The word of the gospel as revealed by God through Christ was declared by Paul to the Corinthians in these terms, "moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures" (1 Cor. 15: 1-4). Paul in his Roman letter irrevocably ties the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ with baptism; "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptised into Jesus Christ were baptised into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection" (Rom. 6:3-5).

Therefore, we can summate this section by saying that Jesus is identified in the word of God as Saviour; revelation is in, by, and through the word, but salvation is exclusively in Christ Jesus. If the way to God is by the word, then it is by Christ; if the truth of God is in the word, then it is in Christ; if life is in the word, then it is Christ, for Jesus said, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me" (John 14:6).

Obedience to the word

I think we have said enough up to this point for us to understand that obedience to the word must be inevitably mean obedience to Christ. If we practice obedience then we are in good company, because Jesus said, "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in His love" (John 15:10). If you want the benefit of divine fellowship, then obey Jesus and consequently you will obey God's word; Jesus said to Judas (not Iscariot), "If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him" (John 14:23).

What does it mean to believe in Jesus? I think we must accept that it is something more than mere mental assent. It is obviously important to understand this correctly because Jesus said, "for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins" (John 8:24). In Acts of Apostles we are taught that belief in Jesus entails something

more; "But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the Kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptised, both men and women" (Acts 8:12). It is hardly surprising to find that this should be so because when Jesus gave instructions to the Apostles shortly before he left the earth, he said, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28:18-20).

In conclusion, in order to relate the purging (or cleansing) from sin which what has gone before, we need to take note of what the writer to the Hebrews says, "For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh; How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance" (heb. 9:13-15).

Dear reader, you must accept Christ as Saviour. To whom can you go? It is Jesus who brought the message of salvation, and died so that God's word might be fulfilled in Him.

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

THE AGONY OF GETHSEMANE

Our Lord after eating the Passover with His disciples, went with them to the Mount of Olives, and entered the Garden of Gethsemane. What really induced Jesus to select that place to be the scene of His ordeal and agony? Why did He choose this garden, in preference to any other place, to be arrested by His enemies?

May we not conceive that as in a garden Adam's self-indulgence ruined us as a race, so in another garden the agonies of the second Adam should restore us again. Gethsemane supplies the answer and the medicine for the world's ills which followed upon the tragedy of the forbidden fruit of Eden.

No flowers blooming on the banks of the four-fold river were ever so precious to our race as the bitter herbs which grew alongside the black and sullen stream of Kedron. Surely here our Lord would remember the many events of history associated with the Kedron and the fact David once fled from the city from his rebellious son as it is written, "The king also passed himself over the brook Kidron." Here we behold the greater David leaving the temple heavy of heart and crossing over the foul brook to try and seek in solitude a solace for His woes. Our Lord intended us to see that our sins changed everything about Him — His joy sorrow: His riches into poverty: His peace into travail: and His glory into shame. Thus Gethsemane, which had become a place of peaceful retirement, a place of hallowed devotion where He had often been nearest heaven in communion with His Heavenly Father, was now to become a place where our sin provided the focus of His sorrow, the centre of His woe. Where He had enjoyed most, there He must suffer most. Our Lord may have chosen this garden because He needed every remembrance of its past joys to sustain Him in His oncoming conflict. There He had gained strength and comfort — and He needed them now. The gnarled and twisted olives knew Him well for He had spent many hours there in peaceful solitude. Just as to-

day many people choose to tackle sickness in their own bed, so Jesus chose to endure His agony on familiar ground. On entering such a garden we would surely be treading holy ground and would remove our shoes from off our feet.

Our suffering Saviour was truly 'A Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.' Jesus bequeathed a wonderful legacy to His disciples when He said to them, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you." And our Lord was the prince among peace-makers but in the Garden of Gethsemane calm is turned to tempest. After supper we learn that He left the upper room when they all had sung the Hallel, and they sang the Great Hallel as they went down the hillside of the Mount of Olives, over the Kedron and into the garden. As Jesus walked from the upper room to the garden He talked cheerfully to his followers and taught them on the way but later amongst the prayers which fell from our Saviour's lips one differed from His previous petitions when He cried, "Father if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me." Many have doubtless wondered down the centuries as to why He so suffered and what it is that so peculiarly marks Gethsemane and the griefs thereof. The simple answer is that our Lord had to take a certain cup from the Father's hand — not from the Jews; not from the traitor Judas; not from the indifferent and sleeping disciples, and not even from the devil himself. The cup was filled by One Jesus very well knew to be His Father. "It pleased the Lord to bruise Him, and He hath put Him to grief . . ." Consider what measure of anguish would be required to wring from the lips of Jesus, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me." And so as our Lord prayed in the garden, encompassed with slumbering followers, He was also encompassed with sorrows above Him, beneath Him, around Him and within Him — His anguish was complete.

The one disciple who was awake was, at that moment, on his way to betray Jesus and how disappointed Jesus must have been. Surely His human nature must have assailed Him with good reasons as to why He should sidestep His ordeal and walk away from it all. Is man worth it? — and the answer must surely be, No! There must have been great battles fought in the heart of Jesus as He was tempted to 'drop out' of the situation — after all it was not His problem for He was personally 'without sin.' There is, of course, only virtue in Christ's acceptance of the cup of suffering when we realize that He overcame the temptation to sidestep it. The Divine purity which cannot bear to make contact with sin must have been mighty in the heart of Christ yet His love for sinful humanity transcended even that; and He drank of the cup to the full.

Surely the awfulness of sin is seen in the events which followed. It was OUR sins which so crushed our Lord. If we could but have been in the garden when our Lord suffered, His groans would have convinced us. Never before did the world hear such groans come from the human breast. And the sweat. Sweat poured from our Lord as if it were great drops of blood. Can we possibly imagine the scene? "My God my Saviour, what aileth Thee?" The reply — "THY sins have made Me suffer thus." YOUR SINS and MY SINS did this to Jesus. Oh dreadful thought. And so as we recall that restless time before the trial spent by our Lord may we remember that some day, before the Day breaks on the Resurrection Morn, we also shall stand before our God at the Great Assize. May we also be restless now with anguish and sadness for the grief and pain we brought upon Jesus and may Gethsemane admonish us by its sweat, tears and groans, to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ as the Only Son of God and may we resolve to give ourselves to Him who so freely gave Himself for us. While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

W. S. BRADLEY, Ilkeston.

ACTION

Psalm 105 1-5. (1) *Give thanks* unto the Lord, call upon His name, make known His deeds among the people.

(2) *Sing unto Him*, sing psalms unto Him, talk ye of all His wondrous works.

(3) *Glory ye in his holy name* let the heart of them rejoice that seek the Lord.

(4) *Seek the Lord* and His strength: seek His face evermore.

(5) *Remember His Marvellous works* that He hath done: His wonders and the judgement of His mouth.

O, give thanks unto the Lord. The action word here is 'give' but give what? Thanks unto the Lord. Be thankful for what we have, health, peace, comfort, satisfaction, all in Christ Jesus. Oh! the blessings that are ours. If truthful, in prayer we tend to skip thanks. We as brethren in the Lord should make earnest prayer of thanks more often. Some of the ancients we find spent all day in prayers of thanksgiving.

Call upon His name. Again another action word, call or pray to, speak to, ask of, drawn nigh unto. We must needs be active in prayer if we are to succeed at all. All men used of God were and are men mighty in prayer. To be heard we must call. Brethren it is important to be a calling or praying individual. It has been stated that miracles have since ceased, but brethren, answered prayer is a miracle. See to it and succeed.

Make known His deeds among the people. Again it is action that is asked from us. Are we endeavouring to make known the gospel message as best we can? Oh there are many ways it can be done. The simplest way for some is to be in attendance at the work of the church: be seen going to, be seen coming from. We cannot all be speakers, preachers, teachers, but we can attend, tell others, pass on materials, bring others, visit, be seen with, in other words active Christianity, not passive. We can all help others to be active.

Sing unto the Lord, talk ye of all his wondrous works. Sing, talk, make known. All three denote action, activity. By singing and telling of Jesus we make known his works and deeds and love towards us. Again we find that it is God's desire that we do His work in simple fashion, sing, talk, tell. We can all do it.

Seek the Lord and his strength; seek his face evermore. Here we have an exhortation aimed at us all. We must needs search the scriptures, read God's word and meditate thereon. Action is required, we are to ponder, think, read; seek, search; all in the same context.

Remember His marvellous works. Remember is to keep in mind His being, His works, His deeds, His love, all recorded and noted for our learning. Be active in remembering. God has done so much for us that we, indeed, should not overlook such great love toward us. Something that we should keep in mind, or remember, is this:

A. All that God has done for us.

B. All that God has given us.

C. All that God can do for us.

Brethren we have a God of action have we not? In this wonderful Psalm we are exhorted to be active in all concepts of worship. If revival is to come it must first start in the individual — in us.

God uses and blesses the active Christian. Brethren let us do our best for the Lord by being that little bit more active in our Christian life.

Andrew P. Sharp, Newtongrange.

HABITS CAN BE HELPFUL

The word "habit" comes from the Latin term for "have." Its meaning suggests, therefore, something which has one in its clutches. Habit is a fixed tendency to think, feel, or act in a given way under a given stimulus. Habit has a physical basis resulting from the connections of the nervous system. It is definitely related to the physical organism. It is likewise a part of the subconscious mind, which is the larger segment of mental life not at the moment in the center of attention. The subconsciousness includes not only memories but attitudes and tendencies to action. These constitute a large part of our mental life and determine largely what we are.

We are increasingly *creatures of habit*. Thinking, feeling, and acting are largely habitual. We are in effect "bundles of habits." Habit has been said to be "society's most precious conservative agent." William James expressed it forcefully when he said:

"We are spinning our own fates, good or evil, and never to be undone. Every smallest stroke of virtue or vice leaves its never so little scar. The drunken Rip Van Winkle, in Jefferson's play, excuses himself from any dereliction by saying, 'I won't count this time!' Well, he may not count it . . . but it is being counted never the less. Deep among his nerve cells and fibres the molecules are counting it, registering and storing it to be used against him when the next temptation comes."

Character results from habits. Sow a thought and you reap an act; sow an act and you reap a habit; sow a habit and you reap a character. One may curse, gamble, drink liquor, or practice immorality until he becomes virtually a slave to the habit. This is the situation with the alcoholic. The more than nine million addictive drinkers in the United States bear mute evidence to this fact.

On the other hand, the development of right thinking, attitudes, and practices can be one of the greatest stabilizing forces in Christian character. A prominent, elderly churchman, when asked how he came to be at church on a cold, rainy Sunday replied: "I have built up the habit of going to church, and I have to reorganize myself if I do not go." To say one gives money or goes to church from habit is to pay him a high compliment. This is not to say habit absent from conviction and desire. Rather, habit in the sense of a customary, definite, and enjoyable regular experience. By such we develop life patterns for self and certainly for others. "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Prov. 22:6).

From: "The Light"

SCRIPTURE READINGS

JANUARY 1980

January 6, Genesis 12, 12-36; Acts 23, 16-35.

January 13, Jeremiah 37, 1, 2, 11-21; Acts 24.

January 20, Genesis 39; Acts 25.

January 27, Genesis 40; Acts 26.

FAMILY LOYALTY

Though the whole life of Paul, the Apostle, seems to us to be filled with religious zeal, we forget his childhood in Tarsus, a university city, in a Jewish family of some eminence through which he could say "But I was free born" (Acts 22,28). Further we only know he was educated under Gamaliel (Acts 22,3). We now learn a sister of his was living at Jerusalem and her son was interested to save his uncles' life. One of the many things which Paul denied himself was surely his family relationships. This evidence of family feeling brings a warm glow to our heart as doubtless it did to

Paul himself. We think also of the Saviour's promise to those who leave the family relationship for His sake (Mark 10,30), fulfilled to Paul as witness his journeyings noticed last month. Under God he owed his life to his nephew for only swift and strong action could save him from such desperate murderers. We recall Paul's passionate love for his own people (Rom. 9,1-3), which certainly must have included his family. Claudius Lysias obviously recognised the danger threatening the young man as an informer. His letter showed more selfish wisdom than truth.

Weakness in high places

Military might produced the Roman Empire but only a big measure of just and tactful treatment of captive nations maintained it for its long history. Its representatives in the New Testament show weaknesses inevitable when responsibility has to be borne by individuals. We see in Pilate a man with great power subject to fears which impelled or compelled him to condemn a person he knew was guiltless. We now see Claudius Lysias lying to get credit for himself (23,27). We see Felix delaying a decision which he could easily have made to release Paul (24,22) and actually hoping to get a bribe (24,26). He probably had information about the bounty collected from the Gentile churches, and brought by Paul's party (24,22). He avoided giving offence to the Jewish leaders in order that his record as a Procurator might look good at Rome (24,27). How much he was affected by Paul's able defence and subsequent advocacy of the gospel message we cannot tell, except that it had no effect on his judging of the case. He merely "passed the buck" (please excuse the phrase but it seems appropriate) to his successor. We find his successor who acted vigorously at the first, so anxious to please the Jews that he gave way to them instead of acting according to his own conscience. Knowing too well what a visit to Jerusalem involved Paul was compelled

to make his appeal to the highest court. He plainly saw that Festus was making his suggestion to please the Jews, not to give Paul a real trial. Phillips paraphrases "I am not prepared to be used as a means of gaining their favour" — a justified comment when compared with Paul's earlier words "as thou also very well knowest" (25,10). We see fear of trouble from a troublesome subject people as motive for surrender by Pilate, Felix and Festus alike. What a contrast to the utterly honest and uncompromising attitude of Paul himself.

Nothing to hide

While we feel how great a series of trials, literal and spiritual, the noble apostle had to endure, there was one vitally important background. He only had to speak the truth every time. His accusers had to invent and exaggerate their case, use a sort of political pressure, employ a professional, and lie to put it forward. Paul did introduce dissension when before the council (23,6) but otherwise his words were a straightforward account of facts. We observe the rather stilted introduction of the orator contrasted with Paul's simple acknowledgement of Felix's competence to judge him, and King Agrippa's Jewish background. It is certain the authorities had by this time realised that Christianity did not present a menace to Roman rule. Military folk keep a close watch now, and did then on any movements likely to endanger orderly behaviour. "Felix had more exact knowledge of that way" (24,22), and probably then knew the falseness of the accusations, and knew something of sectarian bitterness among the Jews.

Everything to declare

The Lord had told Paul that Jerusalem would not accept his testimony about Him, but Paul's determination in spite of warnings from God and Man, proved the means of special, very special opportunities of witnessing to the truths of the gospel. (9,15). From

the castle stairs was a great witness to Jews (22,1-21) — not everybody, we feel sure, remained hardened, and many Christians were about in the town. Even in the council some spoke up for him, and it may be, heard for the first time his testimony to the resurrection (23,9).

His plain words before Felix at least excited interest by both him and his wife, and Paul's subsequent reasoning would not be forgotten even though heard with mixed motives. Festus was faced with a problem through failure to face up to the case himself. The providential visit of Agrippa presented a wonderful opportunity for presentation of the gospel to many who never had heard it before except to reject it as a new Jewish sect. Here the chief military and political leaders came together and heard a man equal in education and culture to themselves giving a clear and forceful story of his own conversion, his plain message from God and the basic facts about Jesus. To Festus a revelation from heaven was nonsense, only the invention of a very clever man, but to Agrippa and other Jewish authorities a reasoned persuasion based upon God's dealings with His people. I suppose we shall never know exactly what Agrippa meant but the final result of Paul's defence was to clear him of any sort of crime against God or man. However the process of law had to be followed, and that brought about a fulfilment of ambition (Acts 19,21). At a time when the outlook was so discouraging the Lord gave him assurance (23,11). With unwavering faith in God he was sustained through times when all seemed hopeless. We assume he was in touch with many Christians in Judaea and Jerusalem as well as in Caesarea itself during the two years of protective imprisonment but what a trial of patience it must have been. Some have supposed that some of his letters were written during this time.

We humbly believe that Luke was at this time gathering from eye witnesses much that he wrote his narrative concerning those matters which have been

fulfilled among us. The earliest chapters of his gospel surely indicate intimate fellowship with the women folk in and around Jerusalem. We feel quite sure he would be often with Paul — that beloved physician!

R. B. Scott

NEWS FROM THE CHURCHES

Haddington, Scotland: It is with great joy that the church here reports three recent baptisms. Gareth and Kirsten Jones (twins aged 9 years of sister Jean Jones) and Isobel Crouch put on their Lord in baptism on Sunday, 28th October, 1979, in the meeting house at Tranent. Their decision to obey their Lord was made known shortly after leaving the social gathering at Newtongrange. We praise the Lord for these youthful additions to the Lord's Kingdom and pray earnestly that they shall be blessed and shall be a blessing, and that they shall remain faithful always.

A. Broad, Sec.

Kentish Town. We enjoyed a time of Praise, Thanksgiving and Encouragement when we celebrated the 108th year of use of Hope Chapel. We looked back at some early London efforts in 1846, and the beginning in John Black's home in 1839. We enjoyed brief addresses from three younger brethren in the afternoon and in the evening our brother Phil Morr spoke. He and his family are now working and worshipping with us. The year up to August had been notable for special effort with our brother Sewell Hall's teaching and preaching with two missions including Saturday meetings for instructive films. Brother Derek Daniell presided in the afternoon representing the Tunbridge Wells Church which has given special support in the work. It was a joy to have support from other churches also.

R. B. Scott.

Newtongrange, Scotland. On Saturday 27th October last, a large number of brethren and friends met for a time of fellowship and praise. Speakers for the day being Bro. Nisbet of Tranent and Bro. J. Morgan of Hindley.

Bro. Nisbet being the first speaker spoke on the Church, apathy, and its consequence. Bro. Morgan's topic of the evening "The Eagle Christian" was much appreciated by the audience.

Music and song were ably provided by the Slamannan District choir, Sis. Roberts, Sis. Hughes, Sis. Gardiner, Bro. Allan and the Sisters Baird. A day of Christian fellowship was the experience of all. At the dispersal of the meeting it was known that three young people from Haddington had decided to seek their Lord in baptism. The brethren from Haddington making the arrangements. Bro. Nisbet and Bro. Morgan served the church on the Lord's Day of the 28th.

The church at Newtongrange wish to thank all who helped make the day a great success.

A. P. Sharp.

Peterhead, Scotland. We have just finished a Mission with Michael Gaunt from Corby. It resulted in two souls being added to the Lord. Ian Downie and Margaret Thomson. We also had two baptisms last month — Lorna Fox and Jean Tait. May the Lord bless these four new additions to the Lord's church.

Wm. Strachan.

Tunbridge Wells, Kent. 'On Saturday 22nd September we baptised Stella Allum who has been attending our meeting for several weeks. Stella came into contact with us through her small son starting at Bible School, when she attended the adult class. In speaking with her Stella expressed great joy at finding somewhere where the Bible was studied. On the following Sunday evening Stephen Daniell was baptised, (the second son of the writer). As we rejoice

together may we too remember these in prayer that they are faithful workers in the Lords vineyard.

So far half of Tunbridge Wells has received the first lesson of our specially written correspondence course, and about 15 have replied. This has given us some good contacts, and has probably been our most successful venture to date. We plan to continue this programme throughout this winter. Please pray for us'.

Derek L. Daniell

OBITUARY

Motherwell, Scotland. It is with much sorrow that we record the sudden passing on Wed. 17th Oct., of our Brother William Wardrop at the age of 73.

Our late brother was a member of the church for almost 59 years, 41 of these with the church at Motherwell.

He was well known and much loved brother, faithfull and active in the work of the church and in the spreading of the Gospel.

He was truly a faithful and able soldier of the cross, one who fought hard and long in the battle against the evil one and having fought a good fight and having kept the faith has now laid down his arms having played his part to the end.

We thank God for his faithfulness, his untiring efforts, his fine example to us all and we remember him with much respect and are thankful for the joy of knowing him, for the joy of working with him and for the joy, our fellowship with him, brought to us.

He will also be remembered for his fine singing voice especially his part in the Motherwell Male Voice in singing the hymn —

"Sun of my Soul, Thou Saviour Dear,
It is not night if thou be near;
O may no earth-born cloud arise
To hide thee from thy servant's eyes."

He will be sadly missed and we recommend his loved ones to our heavenly father's care.

Wm. Purcell, Sec.

COMING EVENT

Manchester: Gospel Meeting, 15th December, 1979. Speaker: E. Winter, Cleveleys. Place: Rylands Suite (side entrance, upstairs), Civic Centre, Chester Road, Stretford, Manchester. Please pray for this meeting, for those attending who need salvation, and pray for the preacher.

Allan Ashurst.

STARVING IN KAMPUCHEA

The church in Haddington, no doubt like many other congregations, have sent a donation of money to the Relief Fund managed by U.N.I.C.E.F. (United Nations Childrens' Emergency Fund) for the attempt to save many of the hundreds of thousands of starving in Kampuchea, especially the many helpless babies and children. I am the Secretary of the Haddington Branch of U.N.I.C.E.F. and if any church members would like to send a small gift to the emergency but are not sure to where to send it I shall be very happy to receive the donation and see that it is passed on to the proper relief authority.

Editor

TRACTS

"Twenty Questions On Churches of Christ." This is a well prepared leaflet; one of the few produced in Britain. Supplies are available from stock at £1.50 per hundred (postage extra). Orders to: John Partington, 86 Lord Street, Hindley, Wigan, Lancashire.

READING CARDS

The reading cards have been promptly printed and are now available. All orders, please, to John Kneller. Price is 4p per card.

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Edward Jess, 12 Eldindean Terrace, Bonnyrigg, Midlothian, Scotland. Tel. 031-663 8285.

It is not sufficient to have great qualities; we must be able to make proper use of them.

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THE SCRIPTURE STANDARD is published monthly.

PRICES PER YEAR - POST PAID BY SURFACE MAIL

UNITED KINGDOM and COMMONWEALTH	£3.00
CANADA & U.S.A.	\$6.00

AIR MAIL please add £1.00 or \$2.00 to above surface mail rates

DISTRIBUTION AGENT & TREASURER:

JOHN K. KNELLER, 4 Glassel Park Road, Longniddry, East Lothian, EH32 0NY
Tel. No. Longniddry (0875) 53212 to whom change of address should be sent.

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"The Scripture Standard" is printed for the publishers by Walter Barker (Printers) Ltd., Langley Mill, Nottm. Tel. 07737 (Langley Mill) 2266