

The SCRIPTURE STANDARD

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

Vol. 68 No. 1

JANUARY, 2001

A HAPPY NEW YEAR TO ALL OUR READERS

I asked the New Year for some motto sweet -
Some rule of life with which to guide my feet:
I asked and paused; he answered sweet and low,
"God's Will to know".
"Will knowledge, then suffice, New Year?" I cried;
And ere the question into silence died,
The answer came; "Nay, but remember, too,
"God's Will to do".

FRESH OPPORTUNITIES

The thresh-hold of a brand new year is probably a very suitable time to consider again the incident involving John Mark, Barnabas and the apostle Paul: i.e. when John decided suddenly to forsake his two companions and return straight home from the first missionary journey of Paul.

This incident and its sequel are worthy, perhaps, of a closer look. It was while Paul and Barnabas sojourned with the other prophets and teachers, at Antioch, that the Holy Spirit said, "**Separate Me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them,**" (Acts 13). Accordingly these two men set out on what is commonly referred to as 'Paul's First Missionary Journey' (for other additional such journeys followed). Verse 5 (of the same chapter) mentions that they took with them John Mark.

JOHN MARK

On this journey John Mark was not regarded as an equal of Barnabas and Saul but an attendant, or serving companion. He was a family relative of Barnabas, being the son of Barnabas' sister (Col. 4:10).

John Mark's mother was Mary, a godly woman, whose house in Jerusalem was used by the Church on certain occasions. Indeed when the apostle Peter was miraculously released from prison (during the persecution of the Church by Herod) and deposited suddenly in the streets of Jerusalem, he immediately made his way to the house of Mary, "**the mother of John whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying**" (praying for the release of Peter). (Acts 12:12). John Mark was probably among that large number of brethren at that prayer-meeting, and thus was not

only raised in a God-fearing home, but grew up in the exciting, active and dangerous days in the early years of the Lord's Church.

It is also thought, by most Bible scholarship, that John Mark was the author of The Gospel According to Mark, but this is not entirely certain. Notwithstanding this, there is little doubt that John Mark and his family played a prominent role in the Church from the first. After this particular bout of persecution against the Church halted by the divine execution of King Herod, Barnabas and Saul travelled north to Antioch and took John Mark with them, obviously thinking highly of him, and subsequently took him with them, as we saw, on Paul's First Missionary Journey. (it was also at this time, at Antioch, that Christ's disciples were, for the first time, referred to as 'Christians'.) (Acts 11:26).

THE DESERTER

When Barnabas, Saul and John Mark set out on that first journey, they made for the island of Cyprus. Barnabas and John Mark had relatives on that island and probably looked forward to visiting them. After making many converts to Christ on the island, including Sergius Paulus, the Pro-Consul, they sailed north across the Mediterranean to Pamphylia (now part of Turkey) and disembarked at a little place called Perga. As soon as they arrived on the mainland John Mark would go no farther and returned forthwith to Jerusalem (probably by the first available ship). Paul and Barnabas had no option but to proceed alone, and they made for Antioch in Pisidia. This was a long (about 100 miles) and very arduous journey with constant danger. The first real danger came from the terrain: high rugged mountain ranges where sheer cliffs had to be negotiated and where rivers burst out from the base of these huge cliffs and dashed wildly down narrow ravines. The second danger came from the wild mountain-men who infested the area, and robbed any travellers who passed through unprotected. Apparently such robbers are still there even to this day. These thieves were heartless and had the habit of slitting throats before searching their victims for money. (From the outset we can see that Paul and Barnabas were not on any 'picnic' and, as we know, Paul, a few days later, was stoned 'to death' at Lystra).

We are not told why John Mark would not continue with the journey once they had reached the Turkey mainland, and we can only guess at it. Perhaps at the beginning of the journey, the young man felt excited by the sense of travel, adventure; new places to visit; new faces to see; new friendships to make; new experiences to enjoy. As the days went by, however, perhaps his thoughts troubled him that his partners were taking him farther and farther away from base, and into very unhealthy territory in Asia. Perhaps John Mark had not bargained for this and his nerve was beginning to break; perhaps the thought of those mountain-men was beginning to freeze his heart with fear. Certainly Howson, in *"Life And Epistle Of Paul"* thinks that the reason was one of fear for personal safety. Paul and Barnabas evidently had the courage of lions although Paul later (2nd Cor. 11:26) refers to 'perils of rivers' and 'perils of robbers', and so was conscious of what lay before them. Perhaps it was unfair to assume that John Mark would necessarily have similar courage. Some have suggested that John Mark was ill but surely Paul would not subsequently be disgusted with John Mark's retreat if the cause had been bodily illness. Some have suggested that Mark was home-sick and yearned for familiar sounds: familiar friendly faces; a comfortable bed; decent meals and to see his mother again.

THE CONSEQUENCE

Whatever John Mark's reason for deserting his colleagues it was of sufficient gravity and seriousness for Paul to resolve that he would never ever take John Mark

with him again. Paul considered that Mark was blameworthy and not to be trusted. Perhaps Paul thought on the proverb, "**Confidence in an unfaithful man, in time of trouble, is like a broken tooth and a foot out of joint**" (Prov. 25:19). At any event he resolved that he could never again place any confidence in this young man.

Many months after their return from this First Missionary Journey, Paul suggested to Barnabas that they make a return journey to all the places they had previously visited and see how the churches were faring. Barnabas was all in favour of the idea and suggested that they again take John Mark with them. Paul was infuriated at the suggestion and there were strong words exchanged. No doubt Paul pointed out the complete lack of the proper qualities of an evangelist in John Mark.

Barnabas on the other hand, being John Mark's uncle, was probably slightly biased, and argued that the man was young and inexperienced and ought to be given another chance. The contention was, however, very sharp and such was the strength of feeling that each went his separate way (the Greek used gives us our work **paraxysm** and certainly denotes a 'head to head' collision). Thus Barnabas took John Mark and went off to the churches in Cyprus, whilst Paul chose a man called Silas and went back to the churches he had established in Asia. Notwithstanding this very strong disagreement **the cause of the gospel did not suffer** and between them, all the churches were duly visited; and a few more established. Nor was there any permanent rift between Paul and Barnabas. All this must have added to the state of black depression of John Mark. We can imagine how he felt when, on his arrival home, he was asked "What are you doing here?": "I thought you were with Paul and Barnabas?": "What has happened; why have you left them?" He no doubt imagined that brethren were pointing him out as a coward who came running home to his mother (and perhaps not just imagining it). Then, on top of all this, to be the means of separating asunder Paul and Barnabas; those two brave stalwarts who had been through so much together; John Mark must have felt very unhappy indeed as he and Barnabas set out for Cyprus.

THE RECOVERY

The first thing that strikes us about this incident is, perhaps, that sometimes even the inspired men of N.T. times could not always agree. Truly as Paul explained to those at Lystra who would have worshipped them, "**We are but men of like passions unto you**". I suppose it is, therefore, understandable when lesser mortals (like ourselves) disagree between ourselves; although I am quite sure that we can not excuse it by saying, "Well Paul and Barnabas disagreed seriously."

Secondly, we must all, at some time or other, have felt the disgrace that John Mark felt.

We have all, at some time or other, been guilty of some action of which we are not proud, and try hard to forget. We have all, at some time or other, let the side down; let a friend down; let the Church down; let the Lord down. Others have been depending upon us, and we have failed them. We have all been a source of disappointment to others. Similarly, like John Mark, we all felt fear and have baulked from the task that would require courage. We have all lacked the moral fibre to do, or say, what should have been said or what should have been done. We have all felt ashamed at our inadequacy. We have all lacked resolve and purpose. We have all been under a cloud; we have all been 'in the dog-house', spiritually speaking. We have all deserted our posts, or repudiated our responsibilities. However, the encouraging feature was that John Mark was prepared to have another attempt, with Barnabas, to be a more resolute and worthy evangelist. To have another go of it, and redeem himself from the stigma of 'deserter' or 'failure.'

The wonderful sequel to the incident is the great success John Mark made of his subsequent efforts and how he retrieved his honour and self-respect. His first faltering steps were not repeated and his effective efforts as an evangelist in later years were a means of a very cordial reconciliation between himself and the apostle Paul. There was, of course, no permanent alienation between Paul and Barnabas; but it is very gratifying to read later of the glowing terms used by Paul to describe John Mark. When in captivity in Rome, Paul could write to the Colossians and say "**Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, saluteth you, and Mark (sister's son of Barnabas) . . . and Justus. These only are my fellow-workers unto the Kingdom of God which have been a comfort to me**" (Col. 4:10). Also Paul in writing to Timothy, could say "**Only Luke is with me: Take Mark and bring him with thee for he is profitable to me for the ministry**" (2 Tim. 4:11). Thus, on being given an another opportunity John Mark succeeded to Paul's unqualified satisfaction, was a '**great comfort**' to him, and was '**profitable to Paul**' in his ministry. And so the deserter made good and never looked back. It seems, in retrospect that Barnabas was justified in giving John Mark the benefit of the doubt; and it seems as if Paul was a bit harsh and hasty in thinking that what Mark had done once he would do again. In the end all things "**turned out rather for the furtherance of the gospel.**" Thus, those 'under a cloud' should be allowed time and opportunity to retrieve themselves. A second, a third and even a fourth chance, must be given to all those who want to do better.

FRESH OPPORTUNITIES

Clearly, John Mark's reason for his premature return home must have been of such an inadequate nature, not only to disgust the apostle Paul, but also to cause the subsequent parting between Paul and Barnabas at a later date, having disappointed Paul to such a severe degree, it must have been a huge task for John to recover Paul's confidence and good opinion. *But John Mark managed it.* As we have seen, when Paul wrote from his prison-house to the Colossians, Mark was already with him and Paul urges the Colossians to receive him. Later in the imprisonment, Paul asks Timothy to join him and bring John Mark for, in Paul's view, he has become invaluable in the gospel work, or, as Paul puts it, "Profitable for the ministry."

Surely all of this is a very satisfactory outcome to the incident, and a great inspiration to all those of us who feel how inadequate we have been, to date, in the Lord's service. We can all do better. Just as there is always room for improvement, there are always new opportunities for improvement. Clearly John Mark found these opportunities and took them. What he could do, we can do.

And so, as the portals of a brand new year open up before us, may we put all past failings behind us, ("forgetting those things which are behind") and, may we, like John Mark, seek to do much better in the future. May each day be a fresh opportunity to become more "**profitable for the ministry**" in the year 2001.

EDITOR.

THE DANGER OF LEGALISM

Seemingly, the temptation to label and classify is so strong that most of us cannot resist it. On every hand, in so many phases of our lives we find this to be true. Sadly, it is no less true in the Church. Such pejoratives as "anti," "progressive," "legalist," and "liberal" are thrown around far too loosely. Rarely do we find that one is attempting to build another's reputation or image when he uses such words, in common usage such terms are hazily defined, if indeed they are defined at all.

Liberalism is a real danger to the cause of Christ. So is legalism! Yet the vast majority of those who are labelled as liberals are really not liberals at all. Likewise, many are labelled by their detractors as legalists when they are not legalists in any sense of the true meaning of that term.

Legalism as it is used in this study refers to one who seeks to justify himself before God by law or rule keeping. One is not a legalist because he seeks to obey every command of God. Nor is one a legalist because he believes in the validity of law, Jesus said, **“If ye love me, keep my commandments.”** Surely, no one would seek to prohibit that which is described by Jesus as a necessary result of loving him. An individual can stand firmly for God’s will, even strictly interpret the word, do all in his power to be always obedient to the commands of our Lord and still not be a legalist. It is when he falls into the trap of thinking that his rule keeping will result in his salvation that he begins to think as a legalist. It is when one forgets or rejects the fact that **“by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast”** that he becomes a legalist.

This is the danger being spoken of when it is affirmed here that legalism is a grave danger to the Church today, even as it was in the first century.

In the first generation of Christianity, legalism made a concentrated effort to take over the faith, in the Roman province of Galatia legalists had told the Gentile Christians that one could not be a Christian unless he kept the ceremonial law exemplified in circumcision. Paul warned these people, **“Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.”**

LEGALISM OF O.T.

The allure of legalism is the temptation to believe that one can simplify the problems of living, it leads one to think he can accept an external standard or a set of rules made by someone else and avoid the responsibility for making decisions.

Legalistic thinking is dangerous because it does not put priority on the good of man. Every rule God has ever made for man was designed for his good. Sometimes changing circumstances have changed the conditions the original instruction had been given to correct. The legalist seems never to be able to realize this. The law of the Old Testament had served its day and purpose well, but Christ had come in fulfilment of that law. The teachers who would have brought the Galatians again under bondage could not grasp that fact.

Christ had problems with the Pharisees over this very weakness in their thinking. Legalism was by no means the only problem Christ had with the Pharisees, but it was one that caused much conflict between the Lord and this religious party. The Pharisees put a great deal of emphasis on the Sabbath and had developed many meticulous interpretations of the laws regarding its observance, Jesus knew and taught that the Sabbath law had been made to guarantee man and beast a day of rest against the oppression of his master. He said **“The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath,”** Christ realized the purpose of the sabbath, knowing that it was not an end within itself, but was intended for the good of man. The Pharisees were so literal in their zeal for the law, they put the letter of the law above the good of man. That is the danger of legalism.

As good as it was, the Old Testament law was pre-Christian. It was designed to prepare its followers for the freedom and responsibility that were to come with faith. Paul had preached freedom and liberty to those to whom he carried the gospel. Since the beginning there have been those who just cannot abide freedom. As soon as one set

of rules has been cast off some are tempted to make new sets of rules for people to obey. Christianity is not a set of rules. It is a mature faith that does not need rules because it is governed by love. Legalism is sub-Christian because it focuses on laws and ignores the person for whom Christ died.

NOT ALWAYS SPECIFIC

A third danger of legalism is its tendency to make the gospel a new law. The gospel is the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ. Let it be clear that Christianity has the highest ethical standard of any system ever developed. It is not a question of whether we are to obey the will of God. Certainly, the Christian will live at the highest level of which he is capable. But it is not response to a system of law. Rather it is in response to a system of faith.

Many have wondered why the New Testament has not been more specific about a lot of matters. The fact that it has not means that every age can be trusted to deal with the problems of its own day rather than being hampered by regulations drawn for an earlier day that no longer are adequate. Man, especially the one who tends to legalistic thinking, would have done it differently. God knew better, as always. Legalism offers a comfortable way for people to coerce unity for a while. But then it breaks apart because people have consciences and the ability to think for themselves. This is the reason creeds have never worked. Surely, we who have always disdained creeds should understand this principle.

Letting tradition, which is not of itself bad, become legalism is always a danger, in religion, the past has always been important. From the past we have our traditions, whether it be oral or written, which point us to the way God or his people have operated in the past. By these traditions we are called to faithfulness and obedience to God. However, there is always a subtle temptation to allow our traditions to become laws. It is when tradition becomes a man-made law, unrecognized as such, that tradition becomes legalism and a danger to the very cause of Christ.

Care should be taken not to conclude that everyone who fails to agree with some new idea we have is a legalist. As in other areas, it is not our province to judge who is or is not a legalist. Let God take care of that! In our own thinking and judgement, however, let us not fall into the trap of legalism. It is a lethal danger!

D. COOK.

THE BLESSING OF FRIENDSHIP

Among the great blessings of life there is nothing that excels the blessing of friendship. If you had everything else in the world except friends, would you esteem that a happy situation? Really there is not enough of anything else to make people happy without friends.

Probably there are hundreds of people travelling the road of life, sighing in the loneliness of lost affection, because their friends of other years are gone.

It is not when the sun shines brightly on life's pathway, but when clouds gather and darkness falls, that friendship is most helpful to us. Solomon says, "**A friend loveth at all times**" (Proverbs 17:17). God will bless your life in prosperity and adversity. And again Solomon says, "**There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.**" This is pre-eminently true of Christ.

Friendship is the most attractive attribute of human character. And here is the most striking expression of friendship I have ever seen. It is the language of Ruth to Naomi. "**Entreat me not to leave thee: for where thou goest, I will go: and where thou**

lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people and thy God my God. Where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried. The Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me" (Ruth 1:16,17).

Probably there is nothing that contributes more to man's happiness than friendship. We esteem enmity a misfortune. But the best of men sometimes have enemies. Jesus and Paul had enemies. And enemies are never a pleasure, but always a pain. The writer of Psalms said, "As with a sword in my bones mine enemies approach me" (Ps. 42:10). And what David experienced was not different from other people.

Friendship is reciprocal. "A man that hath friends must show himself friendly" (Prov. 18:24). But some people are so dumb that they think those they mistreat should be their friends.

HOW TO MAKE FRIENDS

Dale Carnegie wrote a book entitled "How to win friends and influence people." It was a best seller, but I doubt if anyone ever learned how to make friends by reading that book. Friendship is a divine concept, not human.

If a person practised everything taught in Carnegie's book, that would not make him the friend of God. The Bible offers a shorter and more effective road to the same goal. Abraham became the friend of God by doing the will of God. And Jesus said, "Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you" (Jon. 15:14).

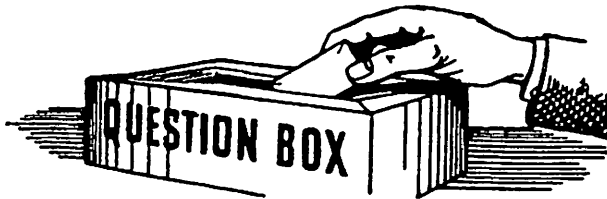
There is no other way to be the friend of Christ. There is no substitute for doing His will. We cannot be the friends of Jesus by the way we think or the way we feel. If we are negligent, we cannot be the friends of Christ. We cannot be His friend if we worship the way we think instead of the way He commands. We cannot be Christ's friend if we teach that some things He has commanded are non-essential. And if we practise vices He has condemned we cannot be His friend.

Jesus has made the way of duty so plain, that we cannot be mistaken about whether we are His friends or enemies. He said plainly that men were His friends when they did what He commanded them.

We cannot be the friends of Jesus by occupying a neutral position on important subjects. Jesus said, "He that is not for Me is against Me."

The Lord may lead us into some dark places, but by faithful obedience, there is a propitious outcome. God is our friend when we do His will without reluctance or delay. The will of God is pre-eminent. The will of man is subordinate. The human will must be in subjection to the Divine will. Are you friendly?

E. M. DAVIES.



Conducted by
Frank Worgan

"In an age when our society clearly appears to reject the Gospel of Christ, but it is equally clearly ready to receive anything connected with the 'occult' - (i.e. astrology, witchcraft, spiritism, etc.) - what does the Bible say about demon possession? Is there such a condition? Does it exist today?"

An important Subject

There is a convenient and easy answer, given by some, which would make further

discussion of the subject irrelevant. They casually dismiss it, claiming that in earlier times in their ignorance people mistakenly took epilepsy or some mental ailment for demon possession, but they would claim, today we know better! However, I think that the question is too important to be dismissed in such a cavalier fashion, because it leaves too many other questions unanswered.

For instance, was the Lord Jesus just as 'ignorant' as the people of His day, when He commanded evil spirits to leave their victims? (Matt. 17: 18, Mk. 1:25).

Was He simply 'in error' when He claimed to cast out demons '*by the Spirit of God*'?

Did He deliberately 'deceive' His twelve disciples, when He '*gave them power against unclean spirits*'? (Matt. 10:1), or when He promised them the power to '*cast out devils*' in His name? (Mk. 16:17).

Or was He, in fact, 'self-deceived,' in thinking that He was able to bestow such power?

These are serious matters, because if Jesus *knew no better* than His contemporaries, or if He was *mistaken* when He treated sick people as though they were demon-possessed, or if He *did* know better, but simply accommodated the ignorance of the people by *pretending* that demon-possession existed when He knew that it did not; or if He *deceived* His own followers, when He promised them the power to deal with a problem which did not really exist, how much confidence can we place in His word?

But let us begin with the first part of the question.

What does the Bible say about demon possession?

Well, so far as the O.T. is concerned, the answer is, virtually nothing!

Last year (September 1999) I dealt with a question about the reason for the extraordinary behaviour of King Saul who tried to kill David, when he was troubled with what is described as 'an evil spirit from the Lord' (1 Sam. 19:9-10). I suggested that the condition from which Saul suffered was 'melancholia' a degenerating mental ailment, characterised by emotional instability and brought on by depression and groundless fears. I also suggested that the only sense in which this might be described as 'from the Lord' is that when God withdrew His support from Saul, he became increasingly insecure and his behaviour more unpredictable. But apart from this isolated case, there is nothing in the O.T. that might be mistaken for demon possession.

On the rare occasions where the phrase '*an evil spirit*' occurs, it merely describes bad feeling between people, as in Jud. 8:23.

Demon Possession - ancient belief

There is, however, ample evidence to show that, even before the time of Abraham and the birth of the Hebrew nation, among ancient peoples such as the Egyptians, demon-possession was regarded as a major cause of all kinds of illness and ailments.

Because sickness was thought to be the result of the activity of evil spirits, treatment was usually a matter left for the priests to prescribe. On the walls of the temples along the river Nile, I have seen carvings depicting surgical instruments used by the priests in their treatment of their patients.

One surgical procedure they used is known today as 'trepanning'. It involved boring a hole in the skull of the patient, or the cutting out of a disc of bone from the skull. The same sort of procedure is sometimes carried out in our hospitals today, only, of course, in a more sophisticated form, and not for the same purpose! In these days trepanning is used as a method of relieving pressure on the brain, but in ancient times the holes that were made in the skull were too small to produce this result. Since they believed that insanity, headaches, epilepsy, etc., were caused by evil spirits or demons, the trepanning operation was carried out in order to release the demon that had taken possession of

the patient, and the small disc of bone which was cut out of the skull - (if the patient survived!) - Was often worn as a charm, to prevent the evil spirit from returning. The surgery was carried out, in one way or another and for the same purpose, among both primitive and sophisticated ancient peoples alike.

Trepanning Not Practised among the Jews

The Children of Israel were notable exceptions. The covenant, which they had with their God, and their acceptance of His law given through Moses, was designed to prevent them from falling into the errors of the idolatrous nations with whom they came into contact, and, it is significant that although trepanned skulls have been found in large numbers in many parts of the world, none has ever been found in Palestine, and there is no reference to the practice in either Jewish literature or the Bible.

Demon-possession among the Jews in the New Testament times

Although there are no references to demon-possession in the Old Testament scriptures, we most certainly find them in the New. Why is that? One possible explanation is that, although the Babylonian Captivity certainly cured them of idolatry so that they never turned to it again, the returning Jews were not cured of superstitious beliefs, - (which they may even have acquired whilst living among the idolatrous Babylonians). It is certainly true that, during the four hundred years between the Testaments, there grew up in Judaism the widespread belief that illnesses of all sorts were the result of demon possession. They saw the world as filled with unclean, evil spirits, which used all sorts of methods to enter and take possession of them.

For example, they believed that demons might settle on their food and enter into them in that way.

In his *'Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah,'* Edersheim presents a graphic picture of a Jewish world that was obsessed with belief in evil spirits, and reveals a society in which people tried to ward off the demons by wearing charms and uttering incantations or curses, or even creating pungent smells!

Whilst these Jewish superstitious notions were far from the truth, the New Testament nevertheless reveals that, in the time of Jesus, demon-possession *did* occur, was a reality, and that He dealt with it as a reality, as it is recorded in the accounts of His miracles.

Leaving aside the several occasions when great crowds were healed of all kinds of ailments, (e.g. Matt. 8:16), there are, among the cases of individual healing performed by Jesus, seven accounts of people being genuinely cured of demon possession.

Josephus's story

I use the word 'genuinely' because it is not difficult to see that this widespread fear of evil-spirits soon created an opportunity for fraudsters and trickery. There were, in Judaism in the time of Jesus, men who went about claiming to have the power to cast out demons' professional 'exorcists' whose claims were taken quite seriously by otherwise intelligent and educated Jews. It is interesting to read the account of Josephus, the Jewish historian who was born about 37 AD and who served as a General in the Jewish army before the fall of Jerusalem. He describes, with obvious seriousness, the methods used by such men.

"I have seen a certain man of my own country, whose name was Eleazar, releasing people that were demonical, in the presence of Vespasian, and his sons, and his captains, and the whole company of soldiers. The manner of his cure was this. He put a ring that had a root of one of those sorts mentioned by Solomon, to the nostrils of demoniac, after which he drew out the demon through his nostrils; and when the man fell down immediately, he adjured him

(*the demon*) to return to him no more, making still mention of Solomon and reciting the incantations which he composed. And when Eleazar would persuade and demonstrate to, the spectators that he had such a power, he set a little way off a cup of water, or basin full of water, and commanded the demon as he went out of the man to overturn it, thereby to let the spectators know that he had left the man; and when this was done, the skill and wisdom of Solomon was shown very manifestly." (*"Antiquities of the Jews" Book 8:ch.2: par. 5*).

Of course, we have no evidence that Solomon ever had anything to do with demoniacs or that he composed the 'incantations' to which Josephus refers. We do know, however, that it was the practice of these itinerant 'exorcists' and 'sorcerors' to make use of the names of great or well-known people in order to frighten off the demon, or more likely, to impress the spectators by their performance.

In Acts 19:13-20 things went badly wrong when a group of these men used the names of Jesus and Paul in Ephesus!

The Lord's Miracles

The difference between the methods used by these men, and the miracles performed by the Lord Jesus is obvious. He did not use spells, incantations or curses, nor did he use the 'bell book and candle' of the present day priest! Instead, he simply issued a word of command, and evil spirits left their victims (Matt. 8 28-33, Matt. 17:15, Mark 1:23-26, Luke 8:2, etc.).

Demon Possession = Epilepsy?

It is sometimes argued that what are described in the New Testament as examples of demon-possession are, in fact, mistaken cases of epilepsy. But in Matt. 4:24, it is shown quite clearly that the New Testament writers were aware of the difference between epilepsy and demon-possession, and they did not confuse the two conditions.

Matt. 4:24 tells us they brought to Jesus *"those afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics and paralytics, and He healed them.*

We conclude, therefore, from the testimony of the New Testament scriptures, that demon possession was a condition distinct from common physical or mental illness and that Jesus exercised His power to cure it.

*(All questions, please, to Frank Worgan, 5 Gryfebank Way,
Houston, Renfrewshire, Scotland. PA6 7NZ).*

SIMPLY CHRISTIANS' NEWS LETTER - DECEMBER 2000

For about five years the multinational outreach of the Church in Stretford, Manchester, U.K. has received unsolicited support from several Churches of Christ and individual brethren to whom we owe a debt of gratitude. We thank the brethren at Stretford and those of other congregations who have given us support and encouragement.

To ensure the handling of the funds complies with U.K. law, it is registered as Charity Number 1056418. We were required to give it a name and decided on the phrase "Simply Christians." My husband Allan Ashurst is responsible for managing this work under the oversight of the Church at Stretford. The work is steadily growing, becoming more demanding and far-reaching. Now that Allan has retired we are able to devote much of our time to this aspect of the Lord's work. This has enabled us to update the leaflets, to enlarge the web-site, to put together a CD of useful information and produce a correspondence course. This course, called "Understanding the Bible," is

to help enquirers and young brethren to get an overall grasp of God's purpose as revealed in the Bible from the beginning to the end.

With their kind permission, the web-site now includes Rose Payne's re-types of British Church of Christ archive literature and Keith Sisman's research into history of Churches of Christ in the U.K. and Europe. All the web-site documents, including the correspondence course plus the compendium on Islam are now on CD.

FOREIGN FIELDS

We now have 160 addresses in 34 countries where there is an ongoing need for correspondence, spiritual support and literature - for many who are persecuted, isolated and needing guidance. There are many requests and expressions of thanks from evangelists and brethren living overseas, for Bibles, tracts, our literature and Bible courses. Some say they have become Christians because of the leaflets. Ex-Muslims request copies of our literature to help them bring others to Christ. Muslims visiting the web-site are able to contact us with their requests by e-mail. Allan also deals with a variety of queries, mostly by e-mail, on many subjects. It is an ideal medium for those who are searching for the truth and are too scared to meet with Christians.

There is a great need for tracts in French for distribution in North Africa. We thank Christine Limb, Paris, for her ongoing translation work and Andrew Marsden, Wigan, for his offer of help.

In May and June 2000 we travelled to Singapore and Malaysia for six weeks visiting many churches where we had been before and getting to know more brethren in new areas. The Church in Pasir Panjang, Singapore had invited Allan to be their guest speaker for their summer camp and also to speak and teach the Church for three weeks. We spent many hours in discussion with groups of young folks couples with families and older brethren. The whole visit was a time of rich fellowship and encouragement to us.

Whilst in Singapore - on impulse - we bought a Chinese Bible. We were able to give it to a Chinese student who came to visit us. He had been brought up in mainland China and had never heard of Jesus or even of God. We pray that by now he will have learnt of Jesus' love. We always try to ensure that our personal contacts have a Bible in their own language.

DROP US A LINE

We get many visitors to our home who find our address on the Internet. This is a joy to us. We are pleased that we were able to take an Iranian family and a young Iranian doctor to Hindley. We thank the Church there for their warm loving welcome and hospitality to them all. We are studying with a Sudanese Muslim couple and a Pakistani Student. We are blest to be able to have such a number of multi-national visitors to our home. We have enjoyed having Somali, Kosovan, Singaporean, Nigerian, Pakistani, Indian, Nepalese, Filipino, Malay, French, Jamaican and, of course, quite a number of Americans this year.

Sister Margaret Masood has sung and recorded Urdu Hymn tunes for ex-Muslims in India who have no hymn books. These together with the words have been sent to brethren in Andhra Pradesh where there are now congregations consisting almost entirely of ex-Muslims. This is a work in which Brother Paul Subhan, Nellore, is heavily involved. We thank Margaret for spending so much time with Allan to produce this very useful tool. We also thank Steven Masood for always being willing to talk to those who are enquiring about Islam. One man, an American living in the Caribbean came to stay with us to learn from Steven and Allan about working with Muslims.

There are agents for our literature and CD's in Australia, Croatia, USA, Scotland

and Singapore. They now have updated leaflets and CD's. These are freely available. Just drop us a line with your request and full address.

GRETCHEN ASHURST,
 "Simply Christians"
 PO Box 71, Manchester. M32 8EJ

LOOK DOWN

In his book *The Power of Positive Thinking*, Norman Vincent Peale observes that problem-solvers may be divided into two categories. In the first class are those who look up at their troubles. Unpleasant situations overwhelm them. A small stain in one's life is allowed to taint the whole fabric of living. The second group contains those who look down on their problems. A difficulty is seen for what it is, and is dealt with not from the standpoint of despair and defeat, but success and optimism.

Christianity is designed to place and keep men in that second category. Jesus Christ exemplifies such an attitude. He was continually harassed by the religious leadership of His day. Because He loved the pure truth more than some of His followers did, a multitude of disciples **"went back, and walked no more with Him"** (John 6:66). His closest associates were so blind spiritually, that throughout His ministry they disbelieved repeated teachings about the nature of the kingdom of God (see Acts 1:6).

Furthermore, the Christ lived with the knowledge that His earthly ministry and life would come to a brutal, painful end in a very short while. At times, it would seem, Jesus became discouraged. For example, after a number of followers defected to the world, He asked the twelve betraying, perhaps a downcast mood. **"Would ye also go away?"** (John 6:67). And that Jesus suffered great anguish shortly preceding and during His crucifixion cannot be denied. Contemplating that rapidly-approaching event, He prayed, **"My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass away from Me"** (Matt. 23:39). Yet Jesus didn't allow His death to preoccupy Him prematurely, nor did He continually mull over some injustices or shortcomings on the part of others.

We did not find a slump-shouldered depressive in Jesus, but rather an optimistic, successful individual, often inspiring those around Him. We see a Saviour who tells a paralytic, **"Son, be of good cheer; thy sins are forgiven"** (Matt. 9:2). We find Jesus shortly before the crucifixion exhorting His confused and fearful disciples, **"In the world we have tribulation; but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world"** (John 16:33). When Christ was confronted with a difficulty (and He encountered many) instead of anxiously anticipating it or brooding about it afterward, He would approach it riding on the crest of life. At the appropriate time, He dealt with difficulties in an intelligent, decisive manner, experiencing the appropriate emotions. Then Jesus put the problem behind Him, and moved on to new challenges. He was God's only begotten Son. Power and glory were His, and He acted as though they were.

Likewise, each faithful Christian is granted tremendous privileges. God works all things for our good (Rom. 8:28). He gives us ultimate success because **"If God is for us, who is against us?"** (Rom. 8:31). In short, through Christ, our Creator has placed us, too, upon the crest of life. To look up at our problems, allowing them to overwhelm us and cause us despair, is to deny our spiritual nature. To look down upon difficulties, dealing with them from a position of power and success, never allowing a brief period of anguish to mar our entire disposition is to live in harmony with what God recognises us to be.

W. LANGFIELD.

TRADITION

The arrangement of two songs, a prayer, and another song before the sermon, is sometimes criticised and labeled as religious tradition. It has been suggested we might become more spiritual by adopting a spontaneous and a more varied approach. The honest critic feels that our regular practice is a source of weakness and leads to ritualism. This is a valid concern. Are we merely following an arrangement of custom in our worship services without regard to other possible arrangements?

We may overlook the fact that practices are continued because time has proven them to have superior value. Many times congregations have experimented with different arrangements, only to return to the former ways of doing things. The old way was found to accommodate the most people. If an ancient way suits the needs and wishes of a group of Christians, are they necessarily tradition bound? On the contrary, an arrangement that has stood the test of time is worthy of some respect.

It is obvious that we must have some kind of an arrangement in order to worship decently and in order. The usual arrangement is adequate to fulfil this command. If the worship is in spirit and in truth, no arrangement can ever make it a ritual. The vital consideration is the condition of the heart, rather than how many items of worship may be arranged. Perhaps we should be more aware of the inward spiritual experience, than the outward arrangement of the worship service.

Each congregation chooses its own arrangement of the items of worship. There are no traditional requirements for any certain form. The worship service is arranged according to the wishes of the members of the congregation. It is sometimes changed for the convenience of some of them. There are no set rules for any congregation. Worship arrangements, such as the time, and order, are made at the discretion of the members of the Church. We have no right to be critical of their choices. To do so would be to sit as judges on their spirituality and judgment. In matters of opinion there should be liberty.

J. MORRIS.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Feb. 4	Deuteronomy 13	Matthew 7:15-29
Feb. 11	Isaiah 53	Matthew 8:1-17
Feb. 18	Jonah 1:1-16	Matthew 8:18-34
Feb. 25	Hosea 6	Matthew 9:1-17

A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH

The older I get, the more I realise that what Jesus said is a matter of life and death. I must, therefore, hearken to His voice and do what He has commanded. To question Him is out of the question! You see, His word is the word that shall judge me on the last day (John 12:48). To hear his sayings and not to act upon them is to be like "a foolish man, who built his house upon the

sand: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon the house, and it fell: and great was the fall of it" (7:26-27). It is important to compare him with the wise man, who built His house upon a rock (7:24-25).

Alexander Campbell in his introduction to the debate with Robert Owen on the *Evidences of Christianity* wrote: "We are willing to test the tree by its fruits". Campbell looked to make a comparison between a sincere Christian and a sincere Pagan; or between a sincere Christian community and a sincere infidel community. He was, of course, acting on information received from the Master (7:15-20). Jesus, in these verses, gives a clear warning on false prophets. They were a serious threat then and they

are a serious threat today. Of course, it is Satan who deals with falsehoods. He is out to confuse and destroy everything that is good. He should not be disregarded nor underestimated. He is our enemy and we must never be ignorant of his devices (2 Corinthians 2:11). Possessing the revelation of God, we are without excuse.

BLESSING FOR GENTILES AND JEWS

Lepers, in Jesus' time, were outcasts from society. The Law itself had pronounced them "unclean" (Leviticus 13:46). I like the fact that Jesus touched this leper in the process of making him clean. It reveals His deep compassion for the man. Although miraculously cleansed, the cured leper was instructed to follow the procedures laid down in the Law (Leviticus 14:2-32). Just think what this man felt about Jesus the rest of his life.

Next, we read of the healing of the centurion's servant from a distance. At this time, His compassion and sympathy were not limited to the Jewish race. The faith of this Gentile centurion was greater than anything He had found amongst His own people (8:10). He must have been some man! Verses 11 and 12 are very telling. "The description is that of a great feast, where multitudes from the east and west should come to recline at the table, while many of the Israelites of that day, like the Pharisees and Sadducees, who were called sons of the kingdom, became legally sons of Abraham, but having no faith, and not worthy to be sons, would be cast into the utter dark without" (Edwin W. Rice).

HEALING THE SICK AND SCREENING VOLUNTEERS

Jesus could heal the sick, cast out demons and still storms. It was once said of Him: "Never man spake like this Man" (John 7:46). It could also have been said of Him: "Never man performed such deeds as this Man." All that Jesus said and did proved without any

shadow of doubt that He was the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.

Demon-possession puzzles a lot of people. I believe that demons were evil spirits or fallen angels. They were not imaginary, but were a reality. They had rebelled against God in heaven and had been cast down to Tartarus (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6; Revelation 12:9). Some had obviously been released from their prison to be involved in the great showdown between Satan and Jesus. They knew the Master because they had been with Him in heaven (8:29). Their cry was one of knowledge, not of faith.

In this portion of Scripture, Jesus addressed two volunteers. His comments to "a certain scribe" (8:19) are very interesting. "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has no where to lay His head" (20). Perhaps the point is that "everybody is at home in Israel's land except the true Israel. The birds of the air - the Roman overlords, the foxes - the Edomite interlopers (cf. Luke 13:32), have made their position secure. The true Israel is disinherited by them: and if you cast your lot with Me and Mine you join the ranks of the dispossessed, and you must be prepared to serve God under those conditions" (T. W. Manson). The other volunteer wanted to discharge his last family obligation before offering total commitment. "Jesus' reply assures him that he need not fear that his father will be left unburied when he dies; the business of the kingdom of God is urgent and brooks no reservation or delay" (F. F. Bruce).

TEMPESTS WITHOUT AND WITHIN

Jesus is the Creator of the world. John once said of Him: "... and without Him was not anything made that was made" (John 1:3). It is quite staggering to think that the man from Nazareth, who was ministering at that time in that small country, was the actual originator of the whole universe. No

wonder He could do all the great things that He did, including the control of the winds and the sea (8:26). I like the fact that immediately after Jesus had rebuked the winds and the sea, there was "a great calm" (8:26). Dear reader, the One who calmed the troubled sea can also calm the troubled breast.

Matthew 8:28-34 should be read in conjunction with Mark 5:1-20 and Luke 8:26-39. The demons did not want to return to the "deep" (Luke 8:31). This is a translation of the Greek word *abussos*, which literally means an immeasurable depth. It is a word that is found seven times in the book of Revelation. W. E. Vine said that "the reference is to the lower regions as the abode of demons, out of which they can be let loose." Their entering the swine or pigs did not save them from their fate.

AUTHORITY OF THE SON OF MAN

Again, we should read the account of the healing of the paralytic in conjunction with Mark 2:1-12 and Luke 5: 17-26. Matthew's account is more compressed in comparison with the two other Synoptists. Those present knew that only Jehovah could forgive sins. Yet Jesus had said: "Son, be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven you" (9:2). His being able to heal miraculously the man sick of the palsy should have led them to see that they were in the presence of God Himself. Jesus of Nazareth was not guilty of blasphemy because He had the power or authority to forgive the sins of men. Of course, His power is effective even today and until the end of time.

CONTROVERSY GROWS

Jesus was engaged in controversy. The Pharisees criticised Him because He ate with publicans and sinners (9:11). In reply, Jesus said: "They who are whole need not a physician, but they who are sick" (9:12). He went on to say: ". . . for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (13). Some commentators have suggested that

this is one of the greatest single-sentence summaries of the Gospel. The disciples of John also questioned Him on the matter of fasting. "Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples fast not?" (9:14). "fasting was recognised as important but could lead to dangers of ostentation or self-righteousness, as here. There is a radical newness about Jesus' message which needs new forms of expression. Patching up Judaism will not do" (R. E. Nixon).

IAN S. DAVIDSON,
Motherwell.

TEST YOUR BIBLICAL KNOWLEDGE

1. What was the fourth plague against Egypt?
2. Who offered sacrifice at Gilgal?
3. Who fastened torches to the tails of foxes?
4. How many of Job's children were killed by a mighty wind?
5. What is Peniel famous for?
6. Nebuchadnezzar's image was made of what?
7. In the book of Revelation who was worthy to open the scroll in God's right hand?
8. Who was the governor of Syria at the time of Jesus' birth?
9. Where did Onesimus come from?
10. How many daughters did Philip have?

THANKS

May I express my sincere thanks to all those kind brothers and sisters who sent me messages of encouragement, and the assurance of their prayers, when they heard about my recent surgery.

There were many telephone calls, which were handled by Isobel. There have been many get-well cards, e-mail messages and letters, also. In fact, they continue to arrive. I would, of course, like to acknowledge each one personally, but I am afraid that this would prove a difficult task. For this reason I

am pleased that our Editor is allowing me, by means of this brief note, to express appreciation of the love and concern that you have shown to both Isobel and me.

I can report that I am making good progress after my surgery and am gradually getting stronger. The medical folk are pleased that my recovery is going well. This, I am sure, is due to the Lord's blessing, the prayers of the brethren and the skills of a very capable surgical team in Glasgow's Western Infirmary's cardio-vascular Unit.

Thank you once again for your kindness. Isobel and I pray that the Lord will bless you, even as He continues to bless us.

FRANK WORGAN.

NEWS FROM THE CHURCHES

Slamannan District: The Quarterly Mutual Benefit Meeting was held at Tranent on 2nd December, when the subject was "What is the meaning of 1 Tim. 2:15 ". . . she shall be saved in child-bearing." The two speakers, Niall Scobbie, Dennyloanhead and Mark Plain, Tranent, gave an excellent exposition of the subject and this was followed

by a general discussion with the audience forming four groups, and later summing-up. As always a great deal emerged from the discussion and much was gained.

Our next meeting will be at Dennyloanhead on March 3rd, God Willing, when the subject will be "In what way was Jesus the Son of God?"

Our thanks to the sisters at Tranent for the excellent refreshments.

HARRY MCGINN (Sec).

COMING EVENTS

TRANENT SOCIAL

17th March, 2001

GLENROTHES MEN'S DAY

3rd February, 2001

1. Piles (Exodus 8:21).
2. King Saul (1 Samuel 13:7-10).
3. Samson (Judges 15:4-5).
4. Ten (Job 12:19).
5. Here Jacob wrestled with God. (Genesis 32:24-30).
6. Gold (Daniel 3:1).
7. Jesus (Revelation 5:5).
8. Quirinius (Luke 2:2).
9. Colosse (Colossians 4:9).
10. Four (Acts 21:8-9).

ANSWERS

THE SCRIPTURE STANDARD is published monthly.

PRICE PER COPY— POST PAID FOR ONE YEAR

UNITED KINGDOM.....£9.00

OVERSEAS BY SURFACE MAIL.....£10.00 (\$16.00US or \$20.00Can)

OVERSEAS BY AIR MAIL.....£14.00 (\$22.00US or \$28.00Can)

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"The Scripture Standard" is printed for the publishers by

Lothian Printers, 109 High Street, Dunbar, East Lothian. EH42 1ES Tel: (01368) 863785