

# The SCRIPTURE STANDARD

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

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Vol. 59 No. 2

FEBRUARY 1991

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## THE WEIGHTIER MATTERS

Those of us using the *Scripture Reading Cards*, of recommended Bible readings for Sunday worship, will know that we have reached the 6th Chapter of Luke's gospel: the early verses of which deal with one of the many occasions on which Jesus, and His disciples, were accused of Sabbath-breaking: a serious charge attracting the death-penalty. Luke describes how Jesus, and the disciples, while walking through the corn-fields; being hungry, plucked some ears of corn, rubbed them in their hands and ate the grains. Certain of the Pharisees (some always seemed to be around) demanded to know from Jesus why he allowed His disciples to **"do that which was unlawful on the sabbath day."** This, of course, was not the first, or last, time when Jesus was challenged upon His apparently 'casual' attitude to the sabbath but it gave Him the opportunity of an instructive and illuminating reply. The sabbath was, of course, one of the 'ten commandments' and its violation was a very serious matter: indeed in Num. 15 we read of a man being put to death solely for gathering sticks on that day. God, through Moses, had said, **"Ye shall keep the sabbath therefore for it is holy unto you: every one that defileth it shall surely be put to death, for whosoever doeth any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the sabbath of rest, holy to the Lord; whosoever doeth any work on the sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death."** (Ex. 31:14, 15). From this we see that the prohibition was against any form of **work**, and the seventh day was described as the **"sabbath of rest."** Thus it was not so much a day of worship, but of rest, involving every form of life; even animals. **Everybody** (amongst the Jews that is, from Moses onwards) was to be allowed to have complete cessation from their burdens and labours every one day in seven, and this included family members, man-servants, maid-servants, visiting strangers and even beasts of burden such as an ox and ass (Duet. 5:14). Presumably God deemed that His people would profit greatly, certainly physically, and perhaps psychologically, from one complete day of rest every week. Physical rest was not the only object of the sabbath, of course, for it was a **sign** between God and the Jews and had other significance.

Those of us brought up in the countryside have, at one time or another, especially as children, walked through the corn-fields, like those disciples, winnowing the ears of corn in our hands, blowing away the husks and eating the grains (usually with a tummy-ache to follow). An eye had always to be kept open in case we would be chased by the farmer for purloining his property: after all, to take a turnip from a turnip field has quite often led to a charge of theft. On this basis, I used to wonder why the

Pharisees, obviously keen to bring Christ into disrepute, did not accuse Him of taking the farmer's property without permission, i.e. of theft. However I have since learned that (in Deut. 23:24) there is a stipulation that the passer-by can enter a neighbour's vineyard and "eat his fill" of the grapes available, provided that he does not put any into a vessel and take them away: and likewise, a passer-by can enter a neighbour's corn-field and "pluck the ears with his hand," provided that he never applies a sickle to the standing corn and takes any away. Thus what Jesus and the disciples did was quite legitimate and offended the Pharisees only insofar as they considered it "work" and a violation of the sabbath rules.

#### "WORK" DIFFICULT TO DEFINE

Those who draft Acts of Parliament and Statutory Instruments know very well how essential it is to choose words carefully, and how necessary (yet difficult) it is to define their words fully and accurately. This they must do not only to make themselves clearly understood, but also to forestall the clever lawyers who are in the business of finding loopholes in legislation. All that the Mosaic law said was that the people must not carry out any "work" on the "sabbath of rest," and so it would be left to Moses to make decisions on a myriad of questions which would arise amongst the people as to what, exactly, constituted "work." Indeed, when the man (previously mentioned) was found gathering sticks on the sabbath, the people brought him to Moses and Aaron because they were in doubt on the matter. It seems also that Moses was not too sure either, for he put the man in custody until it was decided what should be done in this case, and whether the sabbath had been broken. Only a few sabbath ground-rules are mentioned in the O.T. — i.e. no fires could be kindled; food had to be prepared the day previously and nothing could be bought or sold. We can well imagine the controversial discussions and wrangling amongst the Jews as to whether this or that activity came within the prohibition, and referral to higher authority for decisions. Even today some Jews have very strict ideas on the subject and would not, on the sabbath, as much as switch a light on, or off, as this would constitute 'work.'

The Rabbis, whose duty it was to read and interpret the Mosaic Law, added to it until their traditions (The Traditions Of The Elders) became an intolerable burden. As to the definition of 'work' the Rabbis had 39 basic classifications, but also a great many sub-classifications with confusing results, some even comical if it were not so serious. Tying and untying knots were prohibited and led to a formal definition of 'knots' being produced. A camel-driver's knot or a boatman's knot might not be made unless it could be done with one hand. A woman was not allowed to look in a mirror in case she might see a grey hair and be tempted to pluck it out: an action which would be classified by the Rabbis as "reaping" and reaping was certainly prohibited on the sabbath. And so the Pharisees did not object to Jesus, disciples taking ears of corn, but to rubbing them in their hands. This, to them, would constitute reaping or winnowing. Johnson, in his *People's New Testament* says (Quote) "The Traditions Of The Elders had laid down thirty-nine principal prohibitions which were ascribed to the authority of The Great Synagogue and which were called **Abnoth** (main rules) from which stemmed a vast number of **Toldoth** (derivative rules). For instance, reaping and threshing were forbidden by the **Abnoth** and by the **Toldoth**. It was asserted that plucking ears of corn was a kind of reaping, and rubbing them was a kind of threshing. The vitality of these artificial notions among the Jews is extraordinary. Arbarbanel relates that when, in 1492, the Jews were expelled from Spain, and were forbidden to enter the city of Fez lest they should cause a famine, they lived on grass: yet even in this state 'they religiously avoided the violation of the sabbath caused through plucking the grass with their hands'. To avoid this they took the much more laborious method of grovelling on their knees, and cropping the grass with their teeth. To give one

further example of the foolishness of their sabbath requirements, they said that if a Jew put out a lamp from fear (fear of the Gentiles, or of robbers, or on account of an evil spirit) he is guiltless: but if it is to save oil, he is guilty." (Unquote).

### CHRIST'S ATTITUDE TO SABBATH

Jesus was certainly no iconoclast and indeed stated that He came not to destroy the Mosaic Law but to fulfil. Accordingly, until the law was abrogated on Christ's cross, He kept the law and observed the sabbath. Luke says that "as His custom was" Jesus entered the synagogue on the sabbath day (Luke 4:16). However, although Jesus kept the sabbath day, His whole approach to it differed, as we can imagine, from the Jews in general and from the Pharisees in particular. When challenged on this occasion over the matter of eating the ears of corn, He gave a crushing reply by asking those doctors of the law if, in their regular studies of the law, they had never read what David did, when he and his company were hungry. He reminds them that on account of hunger, David did a most unlawful thing, by entering into the tabernacle and taking the twelve loaves from the Holy Place and eating them, sharing them with his companions. David did not deem it necessary to die of starvation when bread was available: albeit sacrilegiously obtained. Necessity had, apparently, a much higher claim than ceremonial, and if David could eat the shewbread because he was hungry, surely Christ's disciples could eat a few ears of corn on the same principle. Furthermore, Jesus asked those Pharisees if they had never read in the law how that the Priests, by virtue of the very nature of their duties, broke the sabbath continually, yet were deemed to be blameless (Matt. 12:5). Jesus also postulated, in this context, the dilemma of the Rabbi who, required by the law to circumcise a child on the eighth day, finds that that eighth day falls on the sabbath. Is he to break the law by not circumcising the child the eighth day? or is he to violate the sabbath by doing so? In practice, the child was circumcised and the sabbath broken: thus demonstrating that ordinary common sense was not entirely redundant even when dealing with the ordinances and commandments of God.

Yes, until it was abolished, the sabbath had to be observed but certainly not in the miserable and ridiculous way required by the Scribes and Pharisees. Christ's revulsion at the burdensome traditions applied to the sabbath, and foisted upon the people by the religious leaders, is very evident: and their thinly veiled hypocrisy angered Him. They would pull their cow out of a pit on the sabbath but objected to Him healing a cripple on the same day. Such was the spiritual condition of the Jews at that time, and their stunted perception of the sabbath. Jesus reminded them that the sabbath had been made for man (for his well-being): man had not been made for the sabbath. Evidently this fact had been lost sight of. The sabbath was sacrosanct but common humanity took precedence. Standing there in the corn-field Jesus concluded His rebuff of the Pharisees by quoting to them the words of God through Hosea (6:6) "For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice", and telling them that the Jews had never understood the meaning of that statement, for if they had they would not have condemned the guiltless. (Matt.12:7). This scripture was evidently regarded by Jesus as a very important lesson to learn, for He quoted it more than once (see Matt. 9:13). One wonders if, today, we are any nearer to knowing what God meant by these words?

### THE WEIGHTIER MATTERS

You may be asking about the relevance of all this and wondering what it has to do with 20th Century Christians? On the face of it, the Pharisees must often have wondered why Jesus was mainly hostile towards them. After all, they were an elite religious group who, at a time of open religious laxity among fellow Jews, had separated and dedicated themselves to pursue a purification of Jewish religious life, and to seek

a revival and strict observance of God's ordinances, as originally intended. (Sounds like the aims of our Restoration Movement)! They also insisted upon an unadulterated Jewish ceremonial and devoted every waking hour to a study of God's word, its interpretation and exposition. Doubtless they expected that Jesus would commend them for all that. They also prayed more vehemently than average; washed (ritually) oftener; fasted oftener and longer and were the one sect which actively sought proselytes, or converts, to the Jewish faith. They were meticulous, even fanatical, in their exacting observance of the law, and would readily have died for their faith. All this would be regarded as extremely commendable in church members today, were they to match such high standards; yet Jesus denounced and castigated the Pharisees.

Why did Jesus upbraid them? Was it just because they were hypocritical? Yes, they made long prayers at street corners to be seen of men; they gave alms ostentatiously; they revelled in greetings in the market-place; they disfigured their faces while fasting, to exaggerate the pain etc. but then surely there's a bit of hypocrisy in all of us; we all like the plaudits of men; and we all employ double standards: we all demand a higher standard in others than we look for in ourselves. No; there was, perhaps, much more to it than hypocrisy: spiritual blindness was also involved, for they had never understood, (as Jesus said) the words of Hosea 6:6 "**I will have mercy and not sacrifice**". In their quest for ceremonial accuracy, and their splitting-of-hairs over correct procedure, they had forgotten completely what their religion was all about. Their faith had been reduced to meetings, the observance of rules and small details, and was in reality an empty shell. Jesus said to them, "**Ye pay tithes of mint, anise and cummin (even the smallest tithes) and yet ye have omitted the weightier matters of the law, Judgement, Mercy and Faith.**" (Matt. 23:23). They were punctilious in the smallest tithe yet had lost touch with the weightier matters. It's possible to be so pre-occupied with the letter that we lose the spirit. Jesus taught that true godliness consisted not in form but in substance; not in show but in heart: not in details but in the great rules of Life; not in strictures on others but in love and understanding. Certainly we must study God's word, and **take every word of it very seriously indeed**, (so did the Pharisees), but when we apply our knowledge of His word we must do it with humility, humanity, patience, mercy, understanding, compassion and with a little bit of common-sense. Wise as serpents yet harmless as doves.

Editor.

## GLEANINGS

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

### THE GOD OF PATIENCE

**"For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.**

**Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus:**

**That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."**

(Romans 15:4-16)

### ROBERT MOFFAT

"F.S. Arnot, the African pioneer missionary, asked the veteran African worker, Moffat, what was the first requisite for work abroad. He replied, "**The first is patience, the second is patience, the third is patience.**" "**Ye have need of patience.**"

(Hebrews 10:36).

### JESUS SAID

**"In your patience possess ye your souls."**

(Luke 21:19).

## A CHORUS

“Jesus, my Saviour, In my behaviour, Help me to be like Thee; Harmless and holy, Loving and lowly, Patient and pure like Thee.”

## THE BIBLE SPEAKS

“And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience;

And patience, hope.”

(Rom. 5:3,4).

“My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations: Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience:

“But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.”

James 1:2-4

“Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us.”

(Hebrews 12:1).

## WORKING AND WAITING

“We have need of patience. We should learn to wait as well as labour, to listen as well as speak, to rest as well as toil. There are moments and hours in life when the supreme duty is to do nothing, to stand quiet and patient, waiting trustfully for God to work, or for the time to come when we can act. Immeasurable harm has been done oftentimes by impatience which could not stand and wait.”

J.R. Miller.

## MORE WISE WORDS FROM W. RILEY

“You mun treat her, sir, as you mean to treat your garden—turn t’ wilderness into a rose-plot, That’ll take time an’ patience, an’ all.”

“I’ve known dark days afore, but none as dark as these. All t’ same, I’ve no patience wi’ them ‘at won’t light their bits o’ candle but sits moping and crying like childer ‘at’s no more sense.”

“I said I would gamble on you, Jack,” he said, “but what I am really doing is something different, This is an investment — an investment in a life. In the best of all law-books — a Book that I am fond of reading and that I find very helpful — there is a story of a man who scattered seed over the ground. Some fell on thorns, some on the trodden path, but some into good soil which brought the man an excellent return on his investment. I must wait and see what I get out of this. Good-bye.”

## SEEK PEACE

“Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it.” Psalm 34:14.

“The Lord Jesus could be moved with compassionate concern for the multitudes; He could sigh over the sufferings of the afflicted; He could weep at the grave of Lazarus; He could marvel at Men’s unbelief; He could thunder forth His anger at the hypocrisy of the Scribes and Pharisees;

He could be “troubled” in prospect of His agony; He could suffer as no other; yet this is the One Who none the less gives to us the most wonderful picture of peace we could ever find or desire, and Who says to us: “Peace I leave with you; My peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid ...”

“Fundamentally, peace is a matter not of our emotions but of our convictions. In these days opinions have taken the place of convictions; that is why there is so little peace and so much restlessness. A man holds his own opinions, and changes them as he will; but a man’s convictions hold him. A man will argue for his opinions: he will die for his convictions, as Sir Robert Anderson said: “Opinions are our own

and should not be too firmly held. Truth is Divine, and is worth living and dying for."

J. Sidlow Baxter.

Selected by Leonard Morgan.

## IF YOU HAVE SINNED

R.H. Boll

It is a serious thing, and not to be regarded lightly. My first word, like John's, would be, "These things I write unto you *that ye may not sin.*" But that is not the last word, thank God; for John goes on to say, "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the propitiation for our sins ..." (1 John 2:1-2).

There is a difference in sins. The Bible speaks of *great* sins a man may commit, which implies that some other sins are of a minor character. But we are not always able to estimate the relative gravity of our offences. Some sins may seem small to us because they are common and habitual; in God's sight they are great. In any case the least sin is not small in God's sight; and if unforgiven would make salvation impossible. And there are great sins. "There is a sin unto death," John says. "All unrighteousness is sin. And there is a sin not unto death" (1 John 5:16,17). Of this we shall have something to say further on.

Say, then, that you have sinned — perhaps a great sin: what now will you do? It is a critical time. You may take a wrong step and go down into indifference and fatal, final hardening. Or you may be forgiven and humbly rejoice in His mercy and His forgiving love. It depends on the attitude you take, and what you do about it. First of all the facts must be faced. Do not minimize your guilt. Do not put yourself off with excuses. When you deal with God you must above all things be honest. You must come as you are, without pretence or any attempt at concealment. There is nothing hid from His sight, and "all things are naked and laid open before the eyes of him with whom we have to do." Now, "if we confess our sins", says John again, "he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Will you believe that? "I acknowledged my sin unto thee," said David, "and mine iniquity did I not hide. I said I will confess my transgressions unto Jehovah; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin" (Ps. 32:5).

"Is it enough," you may ask, "to confess my sin unto God?" Yes for forgiveness it is. For sin is always and primarily against God (Ps. 51:4). But if God's honour, or the demands of righteousness, calls for confession before men or to men, granting you are sincere in the matter, you will not fail to make things right in this regard. If your sin was a public one you must confess it publicly. If by your sin someone was injured and by your confession the wrong can be righted, you must confess it to the parties concerned. If it was between you and God alone, to Him alone you need confess — though even it is good and helpful to confess to faithful brethren also (James 5:16).

### The Basis Of Righteousness

You may have noticed the recurrence of the word "righteous," in the passages above quoted. "He is faithful and *righteous* to forgive us our sins." And, "we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the *righteous.*" So David also: "Deliver me from bloodguiltiness O God of my salvation, and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy *righteousness*" (where we might have expected the word "mercy"). Or, again, when pleading for forgiveness, "In thy faithfulness answer me, and in *righteousness*" (Ps. 51:14; 143:1-2). Now righteousness means justice; and is it justice we want? God forbid. Yet God is just and cannot be otherwise. Where then does His righteousness come in, in forgiving the sinner? John tells us: "We have an Advocate with the Father,

Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the propitiation (the atoning sacrifice) for our sins . . .” God gave His All, His Best, when He gave His Son to die for our sins. And He did it that He “might be just and the justifier of him that hath faith in Jesus” Rom. 3:26). Now He can forgive righteously.

#### **“That He Might Be Feared”**

“There is forgiveness with thee that thou mayest be feared,” said the psalmist. The forgiveness of God fills with a holy fear. All through the Old Testament God inculcated the lesson that sin is a terrible thing, and it calls for blood, and that only the death of the poor victim at the altar could avail to meet its guilt. But those Old Testament sacrifices did only foreshadow the real truth: **“for it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins.”** It required a truer sacrifice — the blood of One who was the dearest, the purest, the most precious and beloved, the Son of His love, and His awful death upon the cross, to lift that debt. **“He is the propitiation for our sins.”**

“My sins, my sins, my Saviour, — Their guilt I never knew  
Till with thee in the desert — I near thy passion drew;  
Till with thee in the garden — I heard thy pleading prayer,  
And saw the blood—drops falling, — That told thy sorrow there.”

Now come, my brother, and gladly receive that forgiveness which was there bought for thee — rejoice and be glad — but rejoice with trembling. It is free, no fee, to you — free yet not cheap. **“There is forgiveness with thee that thou mayest be feared”** (Ps. 130:4)

#### **Cast Not Away Your Boldness**

But to go back to our first question — you have sinned. Now one great danger is that you may get discouraged and think there is no use of starting over. “No use” is the devil’s word. When you hear that, or it is suggested to your mind he is behind it. God says there is use. **“Cast not away therefore your boldness which hath great recompense of reward.”** Whatever may have happened — cast not away your boldness (Heb. 3:6,14). We are not left without hope and without help. John says, **“If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the propitiation for our sins.”**

“Five bleeding wounds he bears — Received on Calvary,  
They pour effectual prayers — Before that throne for me:  
Forgive him, O forgive the cry, — Nor let that ransomed sinner die.”

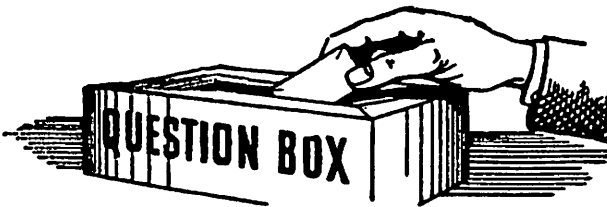
**“Having then a great high priest, who hath passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we have not a high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but one that hath been in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore draw near with boldness unto thy throne of grace, that we may receive mercy, and may find grace to help us in time of need.”** (Heb. 4:14-16).

#### **Doubts and Fears**

It seems hard for us small minded mortals to believe in the free, whole-hearted disinterested love of God, and His full and free forgiveness. We feel there must be some sort of hitch in it — it can’t be just so good and free as that. And often after we have penitently sought the Lord’s forgiveness, we still carry the load of guilt around with us, and with a haunting fear. Perhaps we didn’t fulfil all the “conditions?” Our repentance was not perfect? Or maybe we were not sincere enough? And so on. Often the preacher adds to these doubts and fears. Anxious to uphold the high standards, he represents salvation as if it were placed on top of a greased pole, and exhorts his hearers to climb for it. That makes unhappy Christian lives. Moreover it is impossible to live right with a bad unsatisfied conscience. The forgiveness of sins is the very

foundation of the Christian life. We can have it by faith, and faith takes the Lord at His word. "But I have sinned but asked for forgiveness so often I fear the Lord doesn't think I mean it," says one. A man once remarked that the passage that tells us to forgive seventy times seven (Matt. 18:22) is the hardest in the Bible. "I think it is the sweetest in the Bible," another answered. "How can you say that?" replied the first man. "Well do you think the Lord wants us to be better than He is? If He tells me to forgive seventy times seven, will not He do so too? I can go to Him time and time again, and He will forgive me again." That is not the best way, but it is even so; and we sometimes need that encouragement. However He not only forgives, but is able also "to break the power of cancelled sin, and set the prisoner free." "Unto him that loveth us and loosed us from our sins by his blood . . ." (Revelation 1:5).

R.H.B. (Adapted).




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Conducted by  
Alf Marsden

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**"What is the correct meaning of ". . . sin lieth at the door . . . Gen. 4:7?"**

The brother who sent this question refers to two further scriptures. One he calls the 'keystone scripture', and that is Gen. 3:15, which says, "**And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.**" This, of course, is God speaking to the serpent, whom we identify as Satan. The generally accepted interpretation of this scripture is that the seed of the woman (identified in 'the fulness of time' as Christ Himself), would deal a mortal blow to Satan (i.e. destroy his ultimate power over God's creation), and that in the process of so doing, Christ would suffer a non-mortal blow (i.e., His physical body would suffer the pangs of death, but the glorious power of God would ensure that death could not hold His Christ, and that He would rise triumphant over sin and death); hence, the use of the phrase 'keystone scripture'.

The other scripture referred to by our brother is 2 Cor. 5:21 which reads, "**For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.**" This, of course, refers to Christ being sacrificed for sin. Our brother thus refers to Christ as the 'sin offering', and wonders if 'sin offering' is meant in Gen. 4:7, part of which is quoted in the question. This really seems to be the basis of the question.

#### SETTING THE SCENE

Gen. 4 tells of the birth of Cain to Adam and Eve. We also learn that another child is born to them and he was called Abel. The brothers had different occupations; Cain was a tiller of the ground, and Abel was a shepherd. In the process of time each of them offered the fruits of their labours; Cain brought the fruits of the ground that he had tilled, and Abel brought an animal of the firstlings of his flock. Abel's offering was acceptable to God, and Cain's offering was unacceptable. Thus runs the narrative. It is at this point that the further reasoning becomes a little speculative.

#### THE REASONING

There are those who argue — and with some justification — that because Abel's offering was accepted then God must have given prior instruction as to what He



wanted, but there is no textual confirmation of that; at least, I don't know of any. What we can say, however, is that the conduct of Adam and Eve was **unrighteous**. Why? Because they failed to live up to the **standard** of righteousness, i.e., they disobeyed God's explicit instruction not to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil; instead, they listened to the lies of Satan and did eat. I find it rather significant that when Jesus scathingly denounced the scribes and Pharisees (see Matt. 23), that during the denunciation He said **"That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel . . . etc."** (v. 35). It seems to me that if Jesus could refer to Abel as 'righteous', then that righteousness could only have been achieved by Abel doing God's Will, no matter how that Will might have been communicated in the first instance. The supreme righteousness of God is seen in His justice and mercy, and it would have been against the nature of God to have told Abel what He wanted, and to have left Cain in the dark; even sinful man would find it difficult to condemn someone who didn't know what was expected of him!

There is, however, another angle to this problem. To paraphrase the text in Gen. 4, God said to Cain, "Why are you sulking because your offering was unacceptable? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you **don't do well**, then sin lies at the door" This might lead us to believe that the phrase 'if you do well' referred to the respective lives lived by Cain and Abel **up to that point in time**, and that the individual offerings had nothing to do with the outcome. I feel that this view, however, only serves to reinforce the previous argument. If 'doing well' implies living an acceptable and righteous life before God, then there would seem to be the strong probability that some guidance would have been given by God. If that is so, then Abel would have 'done well' in responding positively to the guidance of God, and Cain would have 'not done well' in following his own inclinations, or should we say, the promptings of Satan.

Gen. 4:7 demands a little further exploration. The R.S.V. reads **"If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is couching at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it."** The verb 'to couch' means to adopt a position of waking rest (like an animal) ready to spring and attack when the opportunity presents itself.' In Rom. 5 Paul says **". . . by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin . . . Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression."** (vv. 12-14). So if death is the result of sin, and death reigned from Adam to Moses, then sin must have reigned from Adam to Moses and would therefore have covered the period of time prior to the recorded incident in Gen. 4:7. I think we can safely conclude that God would have warned us against sin, and furthermore, I would not dismiss the thought that Adam and Eve, the parents of Cain and Abel, would have taught their children about the dire consequences which sin had wrought against them when they had succumbed to the temptation of Satan and had disobeyed the warnings of God. Therefore, my conclusion at this point would be that Abel's offering constituted a 'sin offering' (in line with God's later directives), and that Cain's offering, as such, could not therefore have satisfied the requirements of God. Perhaps some comment on the nature of sin would help us, and in a discussion of this I would like to include the 2 Cor. 5:21 passage.

#### THE NATURE OF SIN

There is no simple definition of sin. The only adequate way to describe it is to refer it, as the Bible does, to the Will or the Law of God which it contravenes, In 1 John 3:4 we read, **"Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law."** Paul also says, **"I had not known sin, but by the law"** (Rom. 7:7). He then goes on to argue the usefulness of the law, **". . . the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good . . . that sin by the commandment**

might become exceeding sinful" (It is helpful to read and study the whole of Rom. 7).

The mistake some people make is in looking at the law as imperfect (it is true, of course, that the law could not save; it was, argues Paul, our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ), nevertheless, it was the expressed will of the living God; it was God speaking to man, and as such was not an abstract idea. The Psalmist confirms that sin is not defection against an abstract idea; he says, **"Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned"** (Ps. 51:4), and, of course, he means God.

The modern idea that sin constitutes a 'misdemeanour' against human nature and social conscience is not biblical; it includes offences against persons, of course, but if God has said specifically, **"thou shalt not steal"**, or **"thou shalt not kill"**, then if offences like that are committed against the person, there is no way of escaping the fact that it is **sin against God**, and the sooner mankind realises that, the better. The awful price that had to be paid to alleviate the guilt of sin should make us analyse our every thought and action. God gave mankind the final exposure of sin when Jesus, His Son, had to die on the cross.

In Cor. 5:21 Paul uses these words, **"For our sake he made him (Jesus) to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him (Jesus) we might become the righteousness of God."** Paul here makes the definitive claim that Jesus did not commit sin. S. Bagsters Eng.Gk.N.T. omits the words 'to be' and reads, "For him, who knew not sin he made for us sin", in other words, God 'treated as sin' the One "who knew no sin", and realising this we can perhaps understand that awful cry of Jesus from the cross, **"My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me"**, but we cannot probe too deeply the agony of the Godhead in the resolution of sin. The Hebrew writer has well said, **"How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the Eternal Spirit, offered himself without spot to God . . . etc."** Jesus was truly 'the sin offering'; not only did He fill the priestly function of 'offering', He Himself was the offering, and as the Writer says, **"For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified"** (Heb. 10:14).

### CONCLUSION

So what is the sum of the teaching? My own conclusion is that the offering made by Abel was a 'sin offering' and pointed to the great 'sin offering' of Christ Himself. I would like to conclude with two more statements from the Hebrew letter which perhaps shed a little more light on the subject. In Heb. 11:4 we read, **"By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh."** Yes, the 'righteous' Abel speaks to us today and encourages us to live acceptably before God. In Heb. 12:2 we are advised to **"look unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."** Yes, He is an example to each one, but we are not made acceptable to God by an example, great though it was; we are saved by a 'sin offering', and what a sin offering! The Son of God Himself, and to cap it all, He still makes intercessions for those who will be obedient to Him through the Gospel. Hallelujah, what a Saviour!

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

### A PLEA FROM THE HEART

All night they come — 365 nights a year — ambulances and police cars, and out stagger (if they're lucky) the drunks, men gasping for breath, kids 'high' on drugs, seeing weird and terrifying scenes, battered wives and little ones, the overdoses, frantic relatives, lives ruined by rape and abortions, over-worked policemen, beautiful girls scarred for life because someone smashed a glass and crushed it into the nearest face.

Road traffic-accident victims, young and old folks — bruised and bleeding after being mugged. Aids sufferers staring death in the face — a heart-breaking stream of suffering. Inside casualty the nurses face violence, verbal aggression, mindless laughter and taunts, stupid answers to important questions.

Exhausted doctors see the 'regulars' yet again — and send them to a short stay ward, smelling of alcohol, vomit and dirty clothes. Into bed they fall, to sleep off the effects of the 'night out' to wake to another day — smoking, drinking, stealing, begging. The injured go to wards where the nurses will try to ease the pain — or to theatre where the repair work begins. Some go to the mortuary.

Brethren, do you think this is an exaggeration of how this permissive society suffers? In twenty years of night nursing at a city hospital I've seen thousands of patients — many dying horrible deaths from cirrhosis of the liver, lung cancer, drug abuse, Aids, V.D., assaults and many diseases. I don't think any words can describe the real thing — it is no exaggeration.

### ALCOHOLISM

You may wonder why I am writing this. I have been horrified, saddened and extremely worried to hear that some Christians are smoking and drinking in their own homes. Is it right to bring poison — which alcohol certainly is — (how often we see young men die after a 'celebration') within easy reach of our children and young members of the church and to give them the impression that it's harmless? Would you ask a teenager to inject with heroin to see if he would become an addict? or suggest a glue-sniffing session, or an experiment with 'crack', because you might have a fantastic 'trip'? Of course you wouldn't! Alcohol causes more misery than drugs, glue and all the other addictions put together.

Our families visit each other and maybe your child will be offered a drink. How tragic if he or she becomes an alcoholic. No one knows until the first drink or the first cigarette whether they will be able to control the craving. It only takes one drink to start a life-time's agony. Please teach your families from the earliest days, both by words and example, that cigarettes, alcohol and drugs, are dangerous and painful.

### TRAGIC RESULTS

On Monday I came home to find my daughter Carole and my very close friend in tears. Why? Because on Saturday evening my friend's youngest son, a fine, handsome, strong, clever 26 year-old man had gone to his home, written two notes, then committed suicide. His shattered dad found him dead. Dead, because for ten dreadful years he was an aggressive lonely alcoholic — drinking fifteen pints of strong beer some nights. His wife had said that day that they couldn't live together anymore. Their beautiful baby was going out of his life, and the future without them was unbearable.

Brethren, please don't be guilty of causing any little ones to stumble. Our loving heavenly Father has given us advice which save us from the misery of abuse if we take it. Please read Prov. 20:1; Prov. 23:20-21; Prov. 23:29-35; Prov. 26:9; Prov. 31:4-7.

Surely we're the people who should be trying to denounce the vicious teaching in magazines, on television and in the newspapers that bad things are good and that we are the losers by not trying them out. How clever the devil is.

We have the true vine — with the promises of love, joy and peace — harmony and happy family life and all the blessings we can think of. Let us enjoy and treasure these, and pray for the millions who suffer because they haven't been loved and taught that life can be full with Jesus, and care for those we know who need us desperately. May our homes always be a safe haven and a place where hope can replace despair.

For Jesus' sake and in His love.

Gretchen Ashurst.  
Sretford, Manchester, U.K.

## SCRIPTURE READINGS

Mar. 3	Isa. 38:	Luke 8:40-56
Mar. 10	Ex. 16:9-36	Luke 9:1-17
Mar. 17	Ex. 33:17 to 34:9	Luke 9:18-36
Mar. 24	Num. 11:16-29	Luke 9:37-50
Mar. 31	2 Kings 1:	Luke 9:51-62

### THE VALUE OF ONE SOUL

Jesus said: **"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it. For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world and lose himself, or be cast away? For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in His own glory and in His Father's and of the holy angels"** (9:23-26).

Why was man created? In Revelation 4:11 we read: **"Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things and for thy pleasure they are and were created."** In essence, how does man please God? The Hebrew writer declared: **"But without faith it is impossible to please Him: for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him"** (11:6). Faith in God, of course, means faith in His Son. To believe God is to believe Jesus and to believe Jesus is to believe God (John 12:44). In the final analysis, Christian faith is a personal faith in the Master. Yes, it can be said: **"Jesus died for all mankind"**; but it can also be said: **"Jesus died for me."** The death of Jesus of Nazareth on Calvary's tree for the guilty sinner, established forever the worth of every human being before God.

### THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Jesus said: **"But I tell you of a truth, there be some standing here, who shall not taste of death, till they see the Kingdom of God"** (9:27). The Kingdom of

God is a vitally important subject to all students of the Bible. The best material I have read on it is by Alexander Campbell in his great volume **THE CHRISTIAN SYSTEM**. For example he wrote: **"We must understand the type, or we cannot understand the antitype. We must understand that which is natural before we can understand that which is spiritual. What then are the essential elements of a kingdom as existing among men? They are five, viz.: King, Constitution, Subjects, Laws and Territory."** He then went on in his essay to discuss the spiritual kingdom's name, constitution, the king, the subjects, the laws, the territory, manners and customs, induction into the kingdom of heaven, the coming of the kingdom, the ascension of the Messiah, the coronation of the Messiah and the present administration of the kingdom. He pin-pointed the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) as the commencement of the reign of heaven in the person of the Messiah, the Son of God and the anointed Monarch of the universe. **"Under Him His people, saved from their sins, have received a kingdom which cannot be shaken or removed."**

Daniel, the prophet, wrote of this kingdom six hundred years before it was established. **"And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms and it shall stand forever"** (2:44). Earthly kingdoms come and go, but God's kingdom goes on forever. What a privilege it is to be a citizen of God's eternal kingdom! What innumerable blessings are enjoyed within it!

### THE TRANSFIGURATION

The transfiguration took place on a mountain (9:28). Both Matthew and Mark call it a high mountain (Matthew 17:1; Mark 9:2). Some commentators have speculated that the mountain in

question was Mount Hermon, which is 9,400 feet above sea-level and sited in northern Israel, fourteen miles from Caesarea Philippi (modern Banias). Last summer I visited this area and found it most impressive.

William Barclay has written: "The significant feature of the transfiguration story is the way in which its every detail either links Jesus with the greatness of the past or nerves Him for the challenge of the future. In Jewish history the mountain tops were always close to God. It was on Mount Sinai that Moses received the Law from God (Exodus 31:18); and it was on Mount Horeb that Elijah had had his revelation of the God who was not in the wind, and not in the earthquake, but in the still small voice (1 Kings 19:8-12). The very act of going up into Mount Hermon was that act of drawing near to God."

It was Moses and Elijah who appeared to Jesus. These were the two supreme figures of the Jewish religion. Moses was the supreme law-giver and Elijah the supreme prophet. But we read: "And there came a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son: hear Him" (9:35).

The apostle Peter who never forgot this "mountain-top" experience, later wrote "For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His Majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to Him from the excellent glory, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with Him in the holy mount" (2 Peter 1:16-18).

#### TO SAVE, NOT TO DESTROY

Jesus said: "For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them" (9:56). The context of his words should be carefully noted. James

and John wanted the Samaritans of the village destroyed because of their bigotry and racial prejudice. The apostles recalled the action of Elijah against Ahaziah's messengers (2 Kings 1). But Jesus would have none of it. He rebuked James and John by saying: "You know not what manner of spirit you are of" (9:55). Adam Clarke has commented: "Jesus is saying, you do not consider that the present is a dispensation of infinite mercy and love; and that the design of God is not to destroy sinners, but to give them space to repent, that he may save them unto eternal life. And you do not consider that the zeal which you feel springs from an evil principle, being more concerned for your own honour than for the honour of God."

Jesus' standards are the complete opposite of the world's standards. Hatred is of the world: love is of the Master. This love (Greek *agape*) extends even to the Christian's enemies. Jesus taught: "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them who spitefully use you and persecute you; that you may be the children of your Father who is heaven . . ." (Matthew 5:44-45). Our Lord, of course, fulfilled these words in His life. There is this to note about Jesus: He has never asked His disciples to do anything that He Himself was not willing to do.

IAN S. DAVIDSON  
Motherwell

## REBUILD

Over a period of years a clear comprehensive understanding of the identity of the New Testament church became settled in the minds of God-fearing people.

(1) They rejected totally all creedbooks as divisive, foreign to New Testament teaching. Their plea was "No book but the Bible, no creed but the Christ."

(2) They accepted God's Word as their only rule of faith and practice. If a practice was not authorised in express

terms or approved precedent from the New Testament, it was rejected.

(3) They respected what the Book said, or allowed, but respected equally divine silence. On the lips of the movement were the watchwords, "We speak where the Bible speaks, we are silent where the Bible is silent."

(4) Avoiding denominational errors, the restorationists insisted on calling "Bible things by Bible names." They rejected all human names. They refused denominational distinctions or appellations as partisan and divisive. They would be called only Christians.

(5) These godly people preached a respect for divine ordinances. They found the New Testament revealed baptism was only for believers — not infants (Mark 16:16). They learned that it was by immersion only, never sprinkling or pouring (Rom. 6:3-4). Of the Communion Service, they taught and practiced keeping the "ordinances as delivered" (1 Cor. 11:2) — just as they were kept in New Testament times.

(6) They recognised the local church as autonomous — independent and self-governing. They rejected legislative councils and conventions, allowing no such to rule them. Elders of a congregation acted as shepherds of the flock, not lords. All Christians were subject to the teaching of the New Testament.

Such was the bent of these restoration pioneers. The most outstanding characteristic of this movement in its inception was the reverential respect for Divine authority revealed in the New Testament. "Back to the Bible," was more than a slogan. It was the life of the movement.

(Sent in by E. Breakell, Hindley,  
from 'The Light.'

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It is not by seasons of mystical meditation and rapturous experience that we learn to abide in Christ; it is by feeding upon His written Word, and looking to the Holy Spirit to implant it in our hearts and to make a living thing within us.

## NEWS FROM THE CHURCHES

**Slamannan District:** The Annual New Year's Day Social took place at Slamannan in wintry conditions, icy pavements, and later, flooded roads. Sadly, due to the weather and illness the seats of some 'regulars' were empty and their presence greatly missed. However those present spent a very pleasant New Year's Day in fellowship, singing hymns and listening to the speakers. Bro. D. Chalmers expressed our opening prayer, Bro. John McCallum led the singing, and Bro. I. Davidson took the closing prayer. The church at Slamannan provided really excellent catering (the pies were great), and the spiritual food from the three speakers, on three differing themes was highly profitable and well received. The speakers were Jack Nisbet, Haddington; Joe Currie, Newtongrange, and Graeme Pearson, Dunfermline. Harry McGinn was in the Chair. During the Social we had a poem from sister Mrs. M. Scobie; and solos from sister Mrs. M. Wilson, Harry McGinn and Peter Sneddon. The good wishes of the assembly were expressed by the Chairman to Bro. Ian Davidson and sister Mary McGhee on the occasion of their forth-coming marriage on 19th January. A final cup of tea before parting was greatly appreciated, and a good time was had by all.

Harry McGinn (Sec.)

**Manchester:** We want you to share a young lady's joy in coming out of darkness into Jesus' most glorious light.

Having come to know and love the Lord Jesus Christ, Miss Saeeda Khatoon for a long time, asked for baptism, but the people she approached were too afraid. In her part of the world, Muslim fanatics kill the preacher as well as the convert. So coming on a visit to this

country, she pursued her desire despite the danger that could ensue, and was baptised in Wigan on Sunday the 16th of December, 1990.

Please pray for her faith to be strong, and for her safety.

We have decided to ask the Home Office for indefinite stay, members of the church have undertaken to look after her.

We are grateful to the church at Longshoot Scholes for preparing the baptistry and providing hospitality.

On behalf of the church at Stretford.

Allan Ashurst

## GHANA APPEAL

### MEDICAL AID

It has been many months since I last appealed for money for Medical Aid for our brethren in Ghana.

There have been a few reasons which have prevented Bro. Bill Cook from leaving Scotland to spend up to a year in Ghana. As I write this appeal, the expected departure is planned for the first week in February, God willing.

Bill intends to set up an account in Ghana when he arrives and I will transfer all the funds in the present account to Ghana

At this moment there is £170 laid aside for Medical Aid. This will not go very far, therefore, it would be good to boost this amount and transfer it to Ghana where Bill can distribute it as he sees fit as he travels around the various congregations.

It was always my intention, to give a monthly report in the *Scripture Standard*, but through lack of feedback, this fell by the wayside. Once Bill gets settled in Kumasi, I am confident that I will be supplied with enough information to give a monthly report in the *Scripture Standard*.

If anyone would care to help replenish the MEDICAL FUND, please contact me. I am aware that there are Brethren with illnesses that we cannot realistically cure, but we can at least

relieve some of the suffering and misery for a few. We can let them know that they are not forgotten, and we do care.

Donations should be made out to:-  
Graeme Pearson (Ghana Appeal)  
13 Fairways  
Dunfermline  
Fife KY12 0DU  
Tel. (0383) 728624

## JACOB'S QUESTION

Jacob said to his sons, "Why do ye look one upon another?" He asked this because each son was waiting for the others to do their duty. And all this time their wives and children were suffering a severe shortage of food. The buck-passing stopped when all the brothers who were old enough went as a group to Egypt to buy food.

There is entirely too much of this attitude in the Lord's body today: "Here am I, Lord; send *him*." We fit too well for comfort in that fable about the little red hen: for every job that needs doing there are many who answer, "Not I!"

Who will set up home Bible studies? Who will look after the elderly and shut-ins? Who will welcome newcomers to town? Who will restore the fallen? Who will sit up with the sick? Who will comfort the bereaved? Who will give sacrificially? Who will worship faithfully?

"Not I," says the buck-passer. "Let someone else do that." And all the time there are souls in grave need — suffering, drifting towards disaster, dying without Christ. We can get our work done only when we all rise up and move forward together. "Why do ye look one upon another?"

P. Hardcastle

GENTLEMEN, give me a nation not spending its earning for drink, and I will take care of the Exchequer.

W. E. Gladstone.

## THE ART OF LISTENING

LISTENING is considered the essential factor in face-to-face communication. To appreciate the full meaning of this statement, the following analogy will help:

When we “tune in” a certain radio station, we at the same time, “tune out” other stations. If the station drifts, we try to focus it again for better reception. We are not satisfied with anything less. The human mind operates very much on the same order. When we speak to someone, the listener may or may not have anything on his mind. To listen well, he must clear his “mental decks”; he will then be “in tune” with the person who is speaking.

It is quite true that on subjects in which we have a deep interest, and in which we are personally involved, it is difficult not to be in a listening mood. However, we assume that a student has a lot to gain even from material with which he is only vaguely familiar.

To help the student get the most from listening, the following guideposts are offered:

1. Listen actively — not passively.
2. Train yourself to get the main idea meaning from material spoken.
3. Exclude from your thinking while listening, interfering thoughts and feelings.
4. Make the speaker realise you are with him while he speaks.
5. Have an open mind on what the speaker has to say.
6. Allow the speaker to finish before asking questions.
7. Check yourself to see if you “drift” while supposedly listening.
8. Remember that there is no limit on improvement in listening habits.
9. Make it your business that once you decide to listen, this will serve as motivation for further listening.
10. Don't be annoyed by a poor speaker, he still may have something important to say.

**THE SCRIPTURE STANDARD is published monthly.**

**PRICE PER YEAR — POST PAID BY SURFACE MAIL**

**UNITED KINGDOM and COMMONWEALTH ..... £ 6.00**  
**CANADA & U.S.A. .... \$10.00**

**AIR MAIL please add £1.50 or \$3.00 to above surface mail rates**

**DISTRIBUTION AGENT & TREASURER:**

**JOHN K. KNELLER, 4 Glassel Park Road, Longniddry, East Lothian, EH32 0NY**  
**Telephone: Longniddry (0875) 53212 to whom change of address should be sent.**

**EDITOR: JAMES R. GARDINER, 87 Main Street, Pathhead, Midlothian,**  
**Scotland EH37 5PT. Telephone: Ford 320 527**

**“The Scripture Standard” is printed for the publishers by**  
**Lothian Printers, 109 High Street, Dunbar, East Lothian. Tel: (0368) 63785**