

The SCRIPTURE STANDARD

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

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THE BIBLE AND THE MODERN WORLD

III: THE CHRISTIAN AND WAR (2)

IN Part 1 of the article on this subject (September S.S.) what we wrote was mainly generalisations as to the Christian's attitude to war. In this second part we shall try to be specific in pointing out the present day situation in which the Christian finds himself, and how the Bible gives him guidance on how to act and live in this situation.

We live in a worldly system. Our states and governments are materialist and employ materialistic methods and means to preserve, protect and advance their causes. The Second World War demonstrated that total war must be engaged in if the most powerful and influential nations were to achieve their ends, whether offensive or defensive. All classes of their populations were involved or recruited to perform their "duties". We had the "Fighting" Fronts and the "Home" Fronts; men, women, and, to some extent, children had their responsibilities deputed by the ruling powers. We were "all in it"; we were all instructed to "Go to it". It was at home almost impossible to find work which was not in some way related to the "war effort"; sometimes we were in it without our being aware of it. All were expected to collaborate. Even if it was obvious that the frightful carnage could not be engaged in, and the deadly weapons used, by those who stood against war, yet the propaganda on the mental, moral and even spiritual planes was at times difficult to resist. It was constantly drummed in upon us what was our duty, our responsibility, in protecting our heritage, liberties, rights; we must not "stab in the back" or betray those brave souls who were fighting against those who were determined to annihilate those things that were worthwhile in our lives. A cruel dilemma was placed before us: were we shirking our responsibilities while we left others to fight and die for our "way of life"? How could we enjoy our freedoms and privileges when we had played no part in preserving them?

The Christian's Alternative

The position so stated sets false problems. It infers that those who do not use

the weapons of violence and materialism and lying and deception to defend the civilisation we enjoy are parasites, spongers and cowards. Such charges or inferences are hard to endure, especially among Christians. We must respond in a positive way by accepting and discharging our responsibilities gladly. We must be even more concerned about our fellow men and their true welfare than are those who are pressed into military service and who raise no objection. The qualities displayed by those at war — bravery, sacrifice, suffering, danger — should even more be displayed by those who fight with very different weapons and for very different causes. Love of God and of our fellows, peace among men (the message of the gospel) must be the means by which Christians demonstrate their unshakable conviction that the way shown and taught by Jesus Christ recorded in the New Testament is the only way to peace and concord for mankind. This is not wishful thinking: all history shows it to be true. The cause of love and peace is far more positive than that of hatred and war: the latter is destructive, the former is constructive and positive, "Peace hath her victories, no less renowned than war" wrote John Milton to the Lord General Cromwell in 1652.

In a materialistic civilisation how is a Christian to behave? He is "in the world but not of the world": Jesus said this in His prayer for His apostles and for those who should believe in Him through their teaching. He told Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world...else (if it were) would my servants fight." "Our commonwealth (citizenship) is in heaven" Paul tells us in his letter to the Philippians: we are first citizens of a spiritual kingdom, and secondarily of this material kingdom. Even by those who make or engage in war it is regarded as an evil to be avoided and only to be engaged in as a last resort. Men realise that to "let loose the dogs of war" is to abandon reason and sanity. Even so, it is said to be justified, a "righteous war" out of which good will come. But even accepting this aspect of war, shall the Christian "do evil that good may follow?" The question carries its own answer, for the Christian at least.

Conscientious Objection

In Great Britain those who refuse to take up military service have a right and privilege granted in very few countries — that of registering as Conscientious Objectors, and appearing before a C.O. Tribunal to state their reasons for objection. On that appearance depends whether he is registered unconditionally as a C.O., conditionally on doing some "alternative service" or fails to convince the Tribunal of his sincerity. This right has become law in this country very largely as an outcome of the brave and firm stand made during the 1st World War of 1914-1918. In that War those who made this stand were treated as criminals (we ought to have written ill-treated, for many were imprisoned, beaten, half-starved and refused medical care when sick). Some few brethren in the churches of Christ are with us today who experienced and remember their sufferings at that time, and a book of record, entitled "For His Name's Sake" was compiled and is still in circulation. Many of the men who endured are the last to speak of their sufferings. But we today owe them a debt of gratitude, for their quiet determination and their loyalty to God rather than to men made the way clearer and easier for their younger brethren later to follow.

But even so it is still a courageous stand to make. Perhaps worse than the physical suffering is the mental conflict: even the very terms "Conscientious Objector", "Conchie" and "Pacifist" are often used as a sneering reproach. One is avoided, "sent to Coventry", by relatives and friends and even brethren in the church; more than one objector has lost his work, or been forced out of business because of the obloquy with which he has been treated; the walls of his house have been plastered with contemptuous slogans because he is a conscientious objector. It is even now often harder to stand against military service than to accept it. Under such circumstances the best the Christian can do is to accept the consequent

suffering and hardship cheerfully and without resentment, and to show by any means within his ability his concern to love and serve his fellows. In that way he is serving the cause and displaying the love of his Master, Jesus Christ, "who also suffered for you, Leaving an example, that you should follow in his steps. He committed no sin; no guile was found on his lips. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered he did not threaten; but he trusted to him who judges justly" (1 Peter 2:21-23).

The Christian's Service

Far from a Christian renouncing, rejecting or shirking his responsibilities in standing against war he is exercising them in the finest way. He is living and acting in the way that others would fain live and act, for they know in their hearts that the way of Christ is the true way and that the Christian is walking that way. The man who makes such a stand is he whom men know is to be trusted and relied upon in times of crisis and need. He shows that he is not carried about by every changing fashion or opinion, but that his convictions are deep and true. Far from his being a coward or an unworthy citizen, he is the truest friend of law and order. He will not be found with the violent, the lawbreakers, the spongers upon his fellow men to keep or assist him. He is the one who helps others, not who relies upon the help of others. He believes the word of our Master, not only as applying to money but to service: "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

EDITOR

(Next month: THE BIBLE AND COLOUR PROBLEMS)

"WITH the monstrous weapon man already has in the atomic bomb humanity is in danger of being trapped in this world by its moral adolescence. Our knowledge of science has clearly outstripped our capacity to control it. We have too many men of science, too few men of God. We have grasped the mystery of the atom and rejected the sermon on the mount. Man is stumbling through a spiritual darkness while toying with the secrets of life and death. The world has achieved brilliance without wisdom, power without conscience. Ours is a world of nuclear giants and ethical infants. We know more about war than we know about peace, more about killing than we know about living. This is our twentieth century's claim to distinction and to progress."

(Gen. Omar Bradley, quoted in *Five Questions in Search of an Answer* by D. Stafford-Clark. 1970)

THE INDIVIDUAL CHRISTIAN'S RESPONSIBILITY TO THE LOCAL CHURCH

WE have seen that the obligations of each individual Christian to the local church are: (1) to be free from divisiveness (1 Cor. 1); (2) to stand firmly upon the word of God (1 Cor. 2); (3) to labour for the building up of the body of Christ in teaching others (1 Cor. 3-4); and (4) to lead a righteously moral life (1 Cor. 5-7). Continuing that line of thought, other responsibilities appear evident from the epistle of First Corinthians.

5 My responsibility is to be genuinely concerned about the consciences of others (1 Cor. 8:1-11,16). The greater portion of this section of the epistle deals with the customs of the day, which exhibit not only the character of the participant but also the attitude he has toward others who might be weaker in faith than he. In the matter of eating meat, some brethren were evidently taking their liberty at the expense of other brethren. In chapter eleven, the admonition is that each should

respect his proper place in God's order of authority. Those who do not do this exhibit an improper influence upon their brethren.

I cannot be so selfish as to be unconcerned. If that which I do causes another to lose faith in God, in some part of His word, or in me as an example, I have sinned. If what I do causes him to sin in some way, I have also erred. Even though my action may be right in itself, I have no right to hurt my brother.

Children of God are sometimes heard to say, "Well, it isn't wrong and I am going to do it. I do not care what he thinks about it." Or some might say, "If I worried about that I never could do anything." My friend, if it is a matter of jeopardizing the soul of your brother, you do not need to do anything (Matt. 18:1-7).

Christianity is a religion of giving. It started with giving when God delivered his Son to a cruel world. To gain from the religion of Christ, I must first give. I must give over a few things and I must give up a few things.

6 My responsibility is to join with other brethren in proper worship (1 Cor. 11:17-34). The brethren at Corinth were destroying themselves because of improprieties in their worship, especially as they concerned irregularity in their partaking of the Lord's Supper. Some would not come when the others did, some worshipped improperly when they did come. The very life of any congregation of God's people depends upon its worship. We must all be there every time we possibly can and we must properly worship while we are there.

One very important purpose of worship is the edifying of those people who worship with us (Col. 3:16). Those who are constantly arguing that the Christian does not need to be present for worship at any service, forget the essential responsibility each of us has to all the other saints to edify them and build them up through worship. I refuse the church a needed part of its life when I refuse to come or when I take lightly the worship when I am present.

7 My responsibility is to respect each member in his place (1 Cor. 12).

At Corinth, many became worried that someone else had a more prominent place in the church than they. Men refused to serve because of jealousy Paul warned them to use what they had been given in service to Christ and to remember that it is God who had given these gifts to men. Each Christian's part in the family of God is of equal importance. All cannot do the same things and each should be happy to see others working and fulfilling the mission of the church.

I owe the local church my best efforts. I owe the local church my recognition of the value of the position occupied by each of the others. I am to hold up the hands of the others in their work as much as they are responsible for encouraging me in my work. This is true of my feelings toward the elders, the deacons, the preacher, the song-leader, or any other saint. When I do not support the functioning of other parts, I hurt the church.

8 My responsibility is to be filled with love (1 Cor. 13-14). The church will only grow as its members are full of love for each other, for the lost, and for the Lord. Love evidences itself.

Even visitors can tell if we are full of love. They will not love us if we do not love ourselves and show love for them. Our guests will turn away from the coldness of our attitudes. I owe it to the church to exude love toward everyone.

9 My responsibility is to be filled with hope (1 Cor. 15). Paul wrote that the greatest thing for the church at Corinth was their belief in the resurrection of Christ—and thus in their own. What a powerful influence it is in the community when a congregation of people really believes in that hope!

10 *My responsibility is to sacrifice freely in support of the church's work (1 Cor. 16:1-4).* The local church has financial obligations which must be met regularly, as well as responsibilities which come up unexpectedly. They must be met whether I give or do not give, or whether I am present or away. If it is right for the congregation to pay its obligations, it is obligatory that I do my part. Even if I must be away at times, I should make arrangement for my contributions to find their way into the treasury where they are depended on. The elders and others cannot carry on consistent work if I fly here and there and do not dig in as an integral part of every aspect of the congregation's life.

Conclusion: My place in the local church is of great importance, whoever I may be. Paul sums it up by saying, "Finally, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58).

COLLY CALDWELL, *Truth Magazine.*

HOW EACH ONE MAY REACH ONE

John L. Clark

- 1 I am a Christian. Every Christian is expected by Christ to bear fruit (John 15:1-6).
- 2 One of the great joys of the Christian life is converting another.
- 3 I will be following the example of Christ. He loved people and showed that great love by personally and individually teaching men and women.
- 4 Christ commanded it in the great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20). Those taught and baptized are to teach others.
- 5 The first century church grew and the gospel spread because Christians "went everywhere preaching the word" (Acts 8:4).
- 6 Teaching others is absolutely necessary to the growth and development of a child of God. Interest in things spiritual is maintained by constantly teaching others.

DO'S AND DON'TS IN REACHING OTHERS

- 1 Don't be professional — be personal.
- 2 Don't seem superior because you feel you are right, but do guide in a definite way.
- 3 Show a sincere interest in the individual you are seeking to teach. Abraham Lincoln said: "If you would win a man to your cause, first convince him you are a sincere friend." Unconsciously, his enemies paid Jesus a great compliment when they called him "a friend of publicans and sinners" (Luke 7:34).
- 4 Don't be dogmatic but rather reason as Isaiah 1:18 encourages. Truth is unchangeable, and our attitude should be firm but gentle (1 Thess. 2:7).
- 5 Don't push people: persuade them.
- 6 Don't represent a religious school or just another church among many. Teach Christ and His way—bring people to the Bible and the church in the Bible!
- 7 Don't be resentful but try to understand why he thinks the way he does.
- 8 Don't be impatient—God gives the increase (1 Cor. 3:6).
- 9 Answer all questions by directing them to the word of God. Point out error kindly but let the Bible convince them—keep the Bible open—they will learn the truth!
- 10 Enter the study with your subject prepared. Prepare the attitude of your heart by prayer — God will help you!

Present Truth.

THE BOOKS OF THE BIBLE

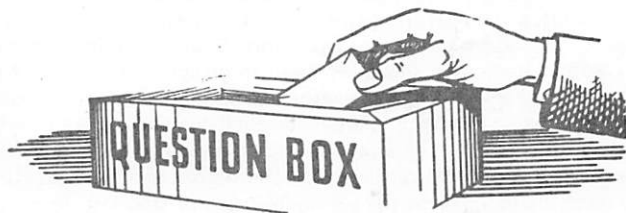
An Unusual Poem

In GENESIS the world is made by God's creative hand;
 In EXODUS the Hebrews march toward their promised land.
 LEVITICUS contains the law — holy and just and good;
 NUMBERS records the tribes enrolled — all sons of Abraham's blood.
 Moses in DEUTERONOMY records God's mighty deeds;
 JOSHUA into Canaan the Lord's host bravely leads.
 In JUDGES their rebellion provokes the Lord to smite,
 But RUTH records the faith of one well pleasing in His sight.
 In FIRST and SECOND SAMUEL of Jesse's son we read;
 Ten tribes in FIRST AND SECOND KINGS revolt against his seed.
 The FIRST and SECOND CHRONICLES see Judah captive made,
 But EZRA leads a remnant back by princely Cyrus's aid.
 The city wall of Zion NEHEMIAH builds again;
 While ESTHER saves her people from the plots of wicked men.
 In JOB we read how faith will live beneath affliction's rod,
 And David's PSALMS are precious songs to every child of God.
 The PROVERBS like a goodly string of choicest pearls appear;
 ECCLESIASTES teaches man how vain are all things here.
 The mystic SONG OF SOLOMON exalts sweet Sharon's rose;
 While Christ, the Saviour and the King, the rapt ISAIAH shows.
 JEREMIAH'S warnings apostate Israel scorns;
 In LAMENTATIONS he the accomplished downfall mourns.
 EZEKIEL tells in wondrous words of dazzling mysteries;
 While kings and empires yet to come DANIEL in vision sees.
 Of judgment and of mercy HOSEA loves to tell;
 JOEL describes the blessed days when God with men will dwell.
 Among Tekoah's herdsmen AMOS receives his call;
 While OBADIAH prophesies of Edom's final fall.
 JONAH enshrines a wondrous type—our resurrected Lord;
 MICAH pronounces Judah lost — lost, but again restored.
 NAHUM declares on Nineveh just judgment to be poured,
 When God Almighty pours his wrath on to Assyria's hoard.
 A view of Chaldea's coming doom HABAKKUK'S visions give;
 Next ZEPHANIAH warns the Jews to turn, repent and live.
 HAGGAI writes of those who see the temple built again,
 And ZECHARIAH prophesies of Christ's triumphant reign.
 MALACHI, the last to touch the high prophetic chord,
 In final notes sublime predicts the coming of the Lord.

MATTHEW, MARK, LUKE and JOHN the holy gospel pen,
 Describing how the Saviour lived and died for love of men.
 ACTS proves how God the apostles owned with signs in every place;
 Paul in ROMANS teaches us how man is saved by grace.
 He in the CORINTHIANS instructs, exhorts, reproves;
 GALATIANS shows that faith in Christ alone the Father loves.
 EPHESIANS and PHILIPPIANS tell what Christians ought to be;
 COLOSSIANS bids us live to God and for eternity.
 In THESSALONIANS we see the Lord will come from Heaven;
 In TIMOTHY and TITUS a bishop's rule is given.
 PHILEMON marks the love of Christ which only Christians know;
 HEBREWS depicts the gospel, prefigured by the Law.

JAMES teaches without holiness faith is but vain and dead;
 PETER marks out the narrow way in which the saints are led.
 JOHN in his three epistles on love delights to dwell;
 JUDE gives awful warning of judgment, wrath and hell.
 Last, REVELATION prophesies of that tremendous day;
 When Christ and Christ alone will be the cleansed sinner's stay.

Voice of Evangelism.



Conducted by
 James Gardiner

"Please comment upon Hebrews 2:10; "For it became him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings," dealing especially with the latter part - "...to make the captain of their salvation perfect through suffering."

IN Hebrews 2, from the first verse to the verse before us, we are reminded of the danger of neglecting the "great salvation", spoken first of all by Christ, to whom (and not to angels) this new dispensation is subjected; and that this Christ was, for a time, humbled below the angels and that this humiliation took place by Divine necessity for our salvation.

"For it became him..."

The writer to the Hebrews informs us, and the Jewish Christians to whom the epistle was directed, that God found it necessary to humiliate Jesus to bring "many Sons to glory". It may be that some were critical of the fact that Jesus lived a humble life and eventually died an ignominious death. They had no doubt expected greater things of God's Messiah. They had looked perhaps for military conquest and an all-conquering hero. In John 12:34 we read of what the people thought: "The people answered him (Jesus). We have heard out of the law that Christ abideth for ever; and how sayest thou, The Son of man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of man?" They also had read in the law, that the Kingdom of the Messiah was an everlasting one and that Christ's reign was one without end. Thus the writer affirms that it was necessary and becoming of God that Jesus should "taste death in bringing many sons to glory". It was necessary. Jesus was not a soldier, He was a Saviour.

"...for whom are all things and by whom are all things..."

This is a reference to God's omnipotence.

"...in bringing many sons unto glory..."

(i.e. in securing the salvation of mankind). The heirs of salvation are here referred to as "sons" in view of their relationship to God "the Father", just as in the following verse they are referred to as "brethren" in view of their relationship to Christ ("He is not ashamed to call them brethren"). To bring many sons to glory is the same as bringing them to heaven and life everlasting. The phrase envisages many sons being brought to glory. Rev. 7:9,10 speaks of a vast "multitude which no man could number".

"...the captain of their salvation..."

An obvious reference to Jesus, as leader or commander of the great army of the redeemed. Jesus is the "Prince of life" (Acts 5:31) and the "author and finisher of our faith" (Heb. 12:2).

"...perfect through suffering..."

The New Testament repeatedly establishes a link between suffering and glory. For example Paul, in 2 Tim. 2:10, says, "Therefore I *endure all things* for the elects' sakes, that they may also obtain the *salvation* which is in Christ Jesus, with *eternal glory*." All the personal sufferings and privations which Paul endured were willingly submitted to so that he might bring the salvation by the gospel to all men, and bring them to glory. Nothing is achieved without cost and effort. This is seen even to much greater effect when we consider what Jesus endured in bringing many sons to glory. Suffering brings men to perfection and strengthens personal character. One could wax poetical on the subject. Pearls are only obtained because of the fact that an irritating grain of sand gets into the oyster shell, causing suffering. Fine steel is obtained only because of the melting heat and the battering on the anvil. Fine gold is obtained because of the refiners fire. Malachi talks of God sitting as a refiner and purifier of silver, purging His sons in the crucible of trials, temptations and suffering. (Malachi 3:2).

One, however, may wonder in what sense Jesus could have been made perfect by suffering. Was not He the sinless son of God? If He had not suffered are we to believe that He would not have been perfect? In what respect then was Jesus perfected by suffering?

To most individuals the word "perfect" or "perfection" when used in reference to people means *moral perfection*, and is used of one who is of flawless character. This is not however, the meaning of the word "perfect" in Heb. 2:10. Jesus was not made *morally* perfect by suffering. He was morally perfect *in spite* of His temptations and sufferings. The word used in Heb. 2:10 means *complete*, wanting in nothing. The Greek word used in the original literally means "complete". The same word is used in John 17:20-23, where Jesus describes the *complete* (perfect) unity which existed between Jesus and God, and prays that that the same oneness (unity) may also be complete (perfect) between Jesus and His disciples. Thus morality or character perfection has nothing to do with Heb. 2:10. Jesus was made *complete* through suffering. Complete in what sense? Complete in the sense of being *fully qualified* for his position as Saviour of mankind. The sufferings (and death) of Jesus *fully qualified* Him "to lead many sons to glory". Many titles and descriptions can be attributed to Jesus, such as prophet, priest, king, advocate, prince, captain, counsellor, shepherd and many others; but amongst them all He was essentially our Saviour. As a *Saviour* He had to accomplish our salvation by His actions and by His sufferings. He is our Saviour because He *did* something for us. He died in our stead, that we should not taste of death. "By His stripes we are healed." *His sufferings* were endured on our behalf. He had of necessity as a perfect (complete) Saviour to sojourn amongst men. But *angels* have sojourned amongst men. Better still then, not simply to sojourn amongst men but to become a man. He became flesh, became a human being and suffered at the hands of men. The humanity of Jesus, then, allowed Him truly to be tried and tempted in all points as we are. It is said that no man is fully qualified to administer to the sick and afflicted, unless he himself has drunk deep from the cup of human sorrow. Jesus drank of the cup to its very dregs. Paul in Col. 1:21,22 says to the Christians at Colosse, "And you that were sometimes alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in *the body of his flesh* through *death*, to present you holy and unblameable and unprovable in his sight." Again, regarding Jesus's voluntary humiliation of Him-

self, Paul says (Phil. 2:4-8) that although Jesus thought it not robbery to be called equal with God, He, "made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." Thus Jesus took upon Himself the limitations and frailties of humanity, but more: He died the death of the flesh. Jesus tasted death. This was all involved in Jesus being made perfect through suffering. Indeed the very next verse (Heb. 2:11) says, "For both He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all one: for which course He is not ashamed to call them brethren." Thus both Jesus and His disciples are one (humanity) and Jesus (being made flesh) is prepared to describe His disciples as "brethren". Continuing the theme, we read in v.14 "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same: that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in all things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people."

What conclusions can we reach therefore on this 'phrase "made perfect through suffering"?

- (1) We noticed that the word "perfect" had no reference to moral excellence but rather meant *completeness*, thoroughly furnished to His work as Saviour.
- (2) His sufferings were only possible because of His humanity. These closing verses of Hebrews 2 confirm this. He became man that He might die a human death and have opportunity to confront, conquer and destroy him that had the power of death, the devil (v.14).
- (3) By conquering death through His own death Jesus released men from a lifetime's bondage to the fear of death (v.15)
- (4) By His suffering on the cross and the shedding of His blood Jesus took men's sins away. Jesus could have died in many ways: He could have been poisoned, drowned, starved to death or put to death in some other way, but He had of necessity to die a violent death so that his blood would drain from His body. Truly His sufferings made Him the complete Saviour.
- (5) Only by becoming man and "partaking of flesh and blood" was He able to call His disciples "brethren" (v.11). "Both He that sanctifieth (Christ) and they who are sanctified (His disciples) are one" (humanity). Only by Christ's becoming man and suffering as man could this relationship be achieved. This was why "He took not on Him the nature of angels but took on Him the seed of Abraham" (v.16).
- (6) "It behoved Him thus to be made like unto His brethren (men) that He might be a merciful and faithful high priest" (v.17) Having been subjected to all the trials and temptations which beset men Jesus can now be a *merciful* Saviour, for as verse 18 puts it: "in that He himself *hath suffered*, being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted.

These then are some thoughts on the latter part of Hebrews 2, on this question of Christ's being perfected as a Saviour, through His humiliation and suffering. These points do not in any way exhaust the matter and most brethren will be able to think of other ways in which Jesus was made "perfect through suffering".

What a wonderful Saviour is Jesus our Lord!

(Questions please to James R. Gardiner, 88 Davidson Terrace, Haddington, East Lothian, Scotland.)

SCRIPTURE READINGS

OCTOBER 1972

| | |
|-------------------|------------------|
| 1—Psalm 1 | Phil. 4:8-23 |
| 8—Psalm 98 | Col. 1:1-23 |
| 15—Isaiah 42:1-17 | Col. 1:24 to 2:7 |
| 22—Lev. 23:1-14 | Col. 2:8-23 |
| 29—Psalm 37:1-16 | Col. 3:1-17 |

THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT COLOSSE

The story behind the letter

THE statement "As many as have not seen my face" (2:1) has made some think that the Colossian Christians had never seen Paul. The words do not necessarily have that meaning, and the general sense of the letter, and circumstances, make us think otherwise. First there is the fact that Paul, Silas and Timothy worked together in that region at least twice, for Colosse is in the province of Phrygia and Laodicea was its chief city (Acts 16:6 and 18:23). Then as Onesimus "is one of you" (4:9) and a slave of Philemon, it appears Philemon also was a Colossian. We can hardly think after reading the letter to Philemon that Paul had not known him personally. Epaphras also "is one of you" (4:12) and worked among them, and served also the churches at Laodicea and Hierapolis. He served with Paul in Rome, but whether he became a prisoner while at Rome, having been sent there by the church, or was arrested through preaching in Phrygia, we do not know. He should surely have carried the letter to his own people, but could not, being a prisoner (Philemon 23).

So Tychicus and Onesimus carried the letter—the one as messenger of goodwill and encouragement and the other as a repentant runaway slave. We think of Tychicus as a faithful servant of the apostle (read Eph. 6:21; 2 Tim. 4:12 and Tit. 3:12). He carried joy and encouragement with him. There is the probability that these two also took the letter to Ephesus, as they would pass through Ephesus on their way; and it may be that

it was left for circulation among the other churches, and might even be that mentioned as "from Laodicea" (4:16). Be that as it may, we rejoice in the happy and loving relationship among the churches over a wide area, and the personal relationships created by the gospel among men of "all sorts and conditions".

The preeminence of Christ

Perhaps the shortest and most outstanding statement of this is by John: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God". In this letter we have the most striking emphasis on the subject. Here are some of the titles given— "the image of the invisible God"; "the firstborn of all creation"; "before all things"; "in Him all things hold together"; "the beginning"; "the firstborn from the dead"; "all the fulness of the Godhead bodily"; "the head of all principality and power". There could be no higher position, and we are reminded of the Saviour's own claim. "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9). So when the Colossians had grasped the truth about the Lord Jesus, they needed no further mediators, or other authorities.

Obviously Paul had special reason for this emphasis. Someone was trying to lead the Colossians into error. They were to put their faith in a human philosophy for their salvation, involving obedience to a certain rigorous treatment of the body, or observance of rites and ceremonies. There were heathen "mysteries" supposed to be revealed to certain specially gifted persons. They doubtless claimed to have visions through angelic messengers, as indicated by "voluntary humility" or worship of the will, and "worshipping of angels", thinking knowledge and love of Christ and obedience to Him as not sufficient. Surely there have been many such in the long sad history of sects and parties, and "Saints" and "Blessed Virgin" and "the angel Moroni". How necessary it is to put our faith only in the ALL-SUFFICIENT Christ.

There were also those who considered it necessary to give obedience to the law

of Moses—to be Jews before there could be forgiveness and salvation. These would claim God's approval through the fact that the law was given by Him through Moses: this is dealt with in the second chapter, where we have the picture of the Lord Jesus "nailing it to the cross" as finished, "blotted out", as He fulfilled it in His triumphant sacrifice of His own body

The New Life

We judge that practically all the converts at Colosse had been heathens. They had certainly been under the power of darkness. The Phrygians were famous for the worship of Bacchus and Cybele, involving debauchery of the lowest type, dignified by the description "religious worship". In our comparatively christianised community of today we can hardly realise what a vast change must be wrought in the heart by the entry of Christ. What a miracle of grace had happened in Colosse! They had been "alienated and enemies in your mind" but they are to be presented "holy and without blemish and unreprouvable". So how necessary that they should not be deflected from following Christ by any teaching of human philosophy, or confused by supposing God had another way for them to worship Him. Not only was it necessary to turn away altogether from the grosser sins to which customs and their heathen neighbours would tempt them, but the very life and spirit of Jesus, manifested in His life as taught in the gospel (at first by inspired men, and later by the written word) must be their example. (3:8ff). Fittingly, baptism begins the new life with the burial of the old man (2:12), putting him off, and putting on the new with the clothing of true Christian conduct girded with love (3:12-17). No wonder Paul and Epaphras strove in their prayers for the perfecting of the "new creatures" in Christ.

The devil's tactics have changed with changing years but he is busy, just as busy as ever. Let us pray for one another that we may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding. R.B. SCOTT

SHEPHERD'S SERMON

THE New Testament was written to press the claims that Jesus of Nazareth was Deity (John 20:30, 31). The claim of the first evangelists of the gospel of Christ was his Deity. According to Acts 2:36 Peter climaxed his first gospel Sermon with: "Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly (believe confidently) that God hath made him both Lord and Christ." John wrote (1 John 1:1-3): "That which was from the beginning—we have seen, and bear witness, and declare unto you the life, the eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us": "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1).

The preaching of Paul constantly emphasized the Deity of His Master (Acts 9:20; 1 Cor. 2:1-5; Rom-1:1-7). The founding of the church, the continuance of its life and its undoubtable permanence is irrefutable proof of the unshakeable faith its first members held in the Deity of Jesus of Nazareth. He must be acknowledged as Deity or proved an imposter. It DOES make a difference what you believe about him who is called Christ. (read Matthew 1:16; 27:17, 22; John 4: 25, 26).

Frank Shepherd.

NEWS FROM THE CHURCHES

Woodstock (Capetown) S. Africa: There has been great rejoicing, on 13th June, during a series of meetings at Rosebank, Mrs. D. Van Der Berg was baptized into Christ. On 20th June Mr & Mrs Van Heldsinger were baptized. All three were results of film-strip lessons in their homes.

On 4th July Mr & Mrs P. Van Der Ventel, and on 9th July their nine-year old daughter Doreen; Allen Martin of Bridgetown and Mrs Catherine Griggs were baptized. Our prayers are that God will bless and use them to lead others to Christ.

We wish to thank Bro. Liebbrandt for this thrilling and uplifting series of meetings, for the fine lessons he presented.

T.W. HARTLE

COMING EVENTS

Easthouses, Midlothian: Annual Social, Saturday 4th November. Guest speakers: W.Wardrop (Motherwell) and J.Moyes (Kirkcaldy).

Venue: Newbattle High School, Easthouses Road, Easthouses, Midlothian.

Tea: 3.30 p.m.

As we are yet a small congregation we trust that the brethren will give us support, and we shall value your prayers.

Andrew P. Sharp 66 Maryburn Road, Easthouses, Dalkeith, Midlothian. EH22 4EU

Tel. 031-663-5294

Kentish Town: Anniversary meetings on Saturday October 7th, at 3 and 6.30 p.m.

Visitors very welcome and prayers requested: Bro. Paul Jones to be with us for three weeks.

D.V.

SOME people's mouths are quicker than their brains. They say things they have not thought of yet.

THOUGHTS ON BURDENS

BEAR ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2).

Take My yoke upon you For My yoke is easy and My burden is light. (Matt. 11:29-30).

I fear no foe, with Thee at hand to bless; Ills have no weight, and tears no bitterness.

Where is death's sting? Where, grave, thy victory?

I triumph still if Thou, abide with me.

(H.F. Lyte)

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. (Heb. 12:1)

Everyone should examine his own conduct, then he will be able to take the measure of his own worth; no need to compare himself with others; each of us will then have his own load to carry (Gal. 6:5-6 *Ronald Knox Version*)

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