



resolute promise to build more, and bigger, prisons. The government are also alarmed at the rampant dishonesty in form-filling for Social Security payments, non-payment of poll-taxes, rents and rates, and the fiddling of income tax returns. The last straw (as far as the Prime Minister is concerned) seems to have come with the recent highlighting of the apparent practice of young girls becoming pregnant so that they might get bigger "handouts" from the State and even a free council house (ahead of all those good citizens who have been for years in the queue). And so, fired up by all these things, our Prime Minister, John Major, in a speech to the nation a few weeks ago, uttered the now famous, and much parodied words "We must get back to basics." Obviously, various interpretations, both by friends and enemies, have been placed on this phrase, but he did also mention "traditional values" and illustrated the term by saying that children should start life with a good home environment and be a member of a normal nuclear family, with a father and mother, and that there should be a discouragement of 'single parent' families. The charge was made that children not given a proper start in life end up giving problems to the police and other authorities later in life.

### RIGHT AND WRONG

This outburst from the P.M.: "Back to basics" was influenced somewhat by the arrest, some time previously, of two ten-year-old boys for the vicious murder of the two-year-old James Bulger, a crime so bestial that it not only made the British gasp but also horrified even those in the rough areas of New York and elsewhere. The Prime Minister was thus forced to acknowledge that there is something very far wrong with British Society and the children it rears. Clearly Britain is very sick and he wondered if British children were being sufficiently informed as to the difference between right and wrong. A good question but a little bit late in the day. The two boys have since been convicted as incorrigible murderers and sentenced to be locked up for life. It emerges that they are from 'broken' homes, more or less out of any control, truant from school regularly and a law unto themselves. One was described by a neighbour as "an evil little monster." To me, the frightening thing is that these boys are not unique and that, from general observation, there are thousands more of them throughout the country. Where are children likely to be learning right from wrong we might ask, and what is the Prime Minister likely to do about it? One M.P. suggested that we have a revival of Sunday Schools but doubted the possibility, owing to the sophistication of young minds nowadays: i.e. too mature to be bothered with things like Sunday Schools. However the M.P. did admit that the present generation of children were certainly **very unlikely** to learn right from wrong from their daily diet of violent T.V. programmes, and their sick videos. In short, the youth of Britain is unlikely to learn right from wrong unless they are taught it at home or in school: and it has to be said that as parents, and as teachers, we don't always give the impression that we know the difference ourselves; and in some homes such education will be sadly lacking. As expected, experts were produced to show that there was "no evidence" to show that Sunday Schools were required, or that violence on T.V. had any adverse affect on our youth.

### WHO DECIDES

A sister recently raised the interesting question of how children, (or adults for that matter) could ever know right from wrong while, at the same time, having a complete ignorance of the Bible. Is there an innate force within man which tells him right from wrong? I am quite sure that there is no such force and that man must be **taught** the difference. The only inner 'force' which may act upon us is the force of "conscience" but conscience is conditioned precisely by our present **level of knowledge**, and cannot rise above that level. Consequently conscience does not tell us what is right or wrong, it merely chides us for doing what we **already believe** to be wrong, or praises us for doing what we **already believe** to be right. Thus we have an interesting

question: who is to decide what is right and what is wrong? Usually amongst mankind "might is right" and the strong dominate the weak. This is seen to be true not only amongst ravenous wolves at meal times, but also amongst highly refined human civilisations. Outside of the Bible, there does not seem to be any source which even pretends to categorise right and wrong, or differentiate between good and evil. Obviously in the rain forests of the Amazon, or remote areas of darkest Africa (before missionaries arrived) the natives would have evolved a code of social behaviour to which there would be general acquiescence and this would consist solely of **their particular** ideas of right and wrong. A neighbouring tribe might have quite a different set of rules. Like beauty, it would depend upon the eye of the beholder, and basically the strong would take advantage of the weak. In other cultures outwith the range and influence of the O.T. (and China is said to be one of the oldest civilisations) men and nations would all have their own conceptions of what was good and bad, right and wrong. Gentile nations have long admired the Jewish code of ethics given by God to Israel, through Moses, and many countries have professed to espouse and copy that code, especially the "Ten Commandments." British law: is said to be based upon some Roman law and upon some Jewish law: particularly the decalogue but I doubt if the Prime Minister, or anybody else would agree that there is much notice taken of the "Ten Commandments" in the Britain of today. However the British concept of morality is nominally based on the Bible.

Obviously, as there is no innate moral gyroscope within man to keep him on an even keel, his knowledge will be restricted to what he has been taught, whether it be in an African village by the headman, or in a Synagogue, or in a Mosque, or in a Buddhist Temple; or in an R.C. Seminary, or wherever else. And obviously a call of "Back to basics" would have quite a different meaning to students from such various sources of education.

### THE YARDSTICK

In every phase of life we require a trustworthy yardstick. Men might argue about what day it is and resolve it by consulting a calendar: or agree on the time by consulting a watch: or agree upon a weight by consulting the scales; or agree on the temperature by consulting a thermometer, etc., etc. If two carpenters argue about the breadth and length of a plank of wood, the matter cannot be resolved until a footrule is produced. This principle is not confined to the world of commerce but applies equally to morals and to such terms as "good and bad" and "right and wrong." The Bible has, of a very long time, been recognised as the final Court of Appeal in all matters of a moral nature. Conscience is not in any sense a guide. The apostle Paul admitted that he inflicted death and cruelty upon Christians and the Church "in all good conscience" until he was stopped in his tracks on the road to Damascus and shown differently. The natives of the Amazon who went head-hunting, or engaged in cannibalism, would never have had any qualms of conscience on the matter until they were taught that such practices were "wrong," and inhuman. The apostle Paul, in his interesting treatise on this subject in Romans, says that, although the law (including the ten commandments) could not take away sin it could **identify** sin, and **define** sin (i.e. could discern between right and wrong: good and evil). He says "**What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay I had not known sin but for the law, for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.**" (Rom. 7:7). "Lust" in this context means the "greedy desire for the possession of others" and here Paul says that his awareness of covetousness was made known to him **ONLY** by the last of the ten commandments, viz. "Thou shalt not covet." This principle can obviously be applied to all other sins. Thus every action, thought or emotion is classified **by the word of God** as being either good or bad.

### THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

The Prime Minister spoke of "right and wrong" in his speech but did not go as far as to talk in terms of "sin." In terms of purely human relationships, actions are construed as being right or wrong: and the public might regard a bad action as a **crime**, but never a **sin**. Humans might not see bad actions as sins but God does. The Bible talks not only of right and wrong but of good and evil and, of course, there is a considerable difference. In all the wringing of hands and heartsearching that went on in Britain when little James Bulger died, to find out how such a dreadful thing could have happened, nobody ever seemed to mention the force of **evil**. Dozens of psychoanalysts were 'grilled' on T.V. but none could hint even at any kind of reason for two young boys to carry out such a sadistic and cold-blooded act of butchery. We cannot always rationalise the antics of the insane. Neither can we always comprehend those bent on evil. It's not just a question of right and wrong. It's a matter of good and evil. Every sane person in this country knows that it is "wrong" to murder, to rob or to rape, but murders, robberies and rapes occur with ever-increasing regularity. Hitler, Stalin, "Jack the Ripper" etc., etc., all knew right from wrong but it did not stop them from the slaughter: they were overcome by evil. The apostle Paul described the contest between good and evil as a continual warfare that went on in his mind. He said, **"For the good that I would, I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then, a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me . . . . But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin, which is in my members. O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin."** (Rom. 7:19).

And so evil is ever present with us. Peter says, **"Be sober, be vigilant: because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking him whom he may devour: whom resist, steadfast in the faith."** The Prime Minister is probably quite unaware of this item (evil) missing from his moral equation, and equally quite unconscious of the fact that the "basics" the country must get back to are in the N.T. and are the teachings of Christ. Paul enquires (in the passage above) **"Who shall deliver me"** from this evil power? and immediately answers his own question, thanking God, that our Deliverer is none other than Jesus the Christ. Jesus did not find any fault with the Ten Commandments as far as moral rectitude is concerned, but rather He improved upon them, and gave the world a much keener sense of what is right and what is wrong. It is no exaggeration, or false boast, to say that if the world was to accept Christ's teachings and **employ them**, all the Prime Minister's worries would vanish overnight. There would be no wars; no crime; no violence; no cruelty; no poverty; no theft and no other cause of unhappiness or anger. Jesus taught that everyone should not only love his neighbour but also his enemy and that we should only do unto others as we would wish them to do unto us. In all of His parables Jesus taught us to be kind and considerate, and, like the good Samaritan, to be full of compassion for those less fortunate. Thus, if Britain was the "Christian" Country that some used to claim it to be, John Major would not have to call us "back to basics" or try to promote a moral crusade. However, Sunday Schools will doubtless continue to be derided, and the Bible will continue to be ignored. Politicians will try to better the situation in the only way they know: by legislation. As for the clergy: (as one M.P. pointed out the other day) they don't have time to teach the people right from wrong; they are too busy interfering in politics.

Talking earlier about cannibals, and about how people scoff at the beneficial effects of the Bible, reminds me of the story of the M.P. who was visiting some African villages. He saw in one village what looked like a witch-doctor sitting in his doorway

reading a Bible. The M.P. being an atheist began to scoff at the Bible and Christian beliefs. "What good has that Bible ever done for you" the M.P. demanded. "I don't know about that," said the native, "but it has certainly done you a power of good." "And how do you make that out?" asked the M.P. "Well Sir, until recently, we were all cannibals in this village" was the wry reply.

A country can only improve if the **individuals**, living in that country, improve. And so we must all, as **individuals**, endeavour to improve ourselves. Let us try to be even better citizens, and even better neighbours, as we enter into this new year of 1994. And may we be more profitable as servants of Christ in the kingdom of our Heavenly Father. By all means let us "get back to basics" — that is, let us get back to the infallible words of God.

EDITOR.

## GLEANINGS

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

### KNOWING

"I KNOW the crimson stain of sin,  
Defiling all without, within;  
But now rejoicing this I know  
That He has washed me white as snow.  
I praise Him for the cleansing tide,  
Because I know that Jesus died."

F.R.H.

### AN HIGHWAY FOR OUR GOD

"And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called the way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein."

Isaiah 35:8

### THE GOSPEL IN PERSON

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." John 3:16.

**A LOVE — GOD SO LOVED — A GIFT — THAT HE GAVE**

**AN OFFER — WHOSEVER BELIEVETH**

**A DANGER — SHOULD NOT PERISH — A TREASURE — EVERLASTING LIFE**

**A TREASURE — EVERLASTING LIFE**

"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

Matthew 6:19-21

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field."

Matthew 13:44

### AND THE LIFE

"Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again. Martha saith unto him, I know that He shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day.

Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, **and the life**: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believeest thou this?"

John 11:23-26

### ETERNAL LIFE

"And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.

These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.”

1 John 5:11-13.

“Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Romans 5:20-21.

“For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Romans 6:23.

### MY GOD I THANK THEE

“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.”

2 Corinthians 5:21.

### HOW DO WE FIND THIS LIFE? — John 3:1-7

Jesus answered and said unto him, “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Verse 3 . . . Jesus answered, “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.” Verses 5-7.

The apostle Peter tells us in Acts chapter 2 what we ought to do, (verse 38): Then Peter said unto them, “**Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.**”

The apostle Paul tells us (after we have believed and repented) what to do in Romans chapter 6: verses 3 and 4: “**Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.**”

Do you remember the words quoted, by Henry Moorhouse: “My friends, for a whole week I have been trying to tell you how much God loves you, but I cannot do it with this poor stammering tongue. If I could borrow Jacob’s ladder and climb up to heaven, and ask Gabriel, who stands in the presence of the Almighty, if he could tell me how much love the Father has for the world, all he could say would be, ‘**God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.**’”

“But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” Romans 5:8.

“O Love that will not let me go,  
I rest my weary soul on Thee;  
I give Thee back the life I Owe,  
That in Thine ocean depths its flow  
May richer, fuller be.

Selected by Leonard Morgan.

## DO YOU KNOW JESUS?

The concept of fearing God is used by Solomon to mean revere or respect God. He is not teaching that knowledge begins when we sit trembling of the very thought of God. But knowledge begins when we begin to see God in his right and proper place. I need to teach my children to fear fire. I need to teach them to fear it in the sense they do not play with it, but see it and use it as it should be used. As long as it is used properly there is no need to be frightened of it. But, if they do not respect its power and potential danger, then it means they do not really know what it is. It is interesting to read the book of Exodus. As God was leading the people out of Egypt he had to teach them to “know” him. The people did not really know the Lord at

this time. God taught them to know him through the many powerful signs he did. Through these signs he also taught them to fear him, to respect him. Next time you read the book notice how many times God told the people before he did some great sign exactly what he was going to do and said, **“I am doing this ‘that you shall know that I am the Lord your God.’”** He was teaching the people reverence and respect — the beginning of their knowledge of God.

Second, knowing God means obeying his commandments. In John 14:15 Jesus teaches, **“If you love me, keep my commandments,”** Jesus teaches that the true test of whether or not we are his disciple is not in what we say, but in what we do. We prove our love by our obedience to him. The same thing might be said of knowing Jesus and knowing God. One cannot proclaim, **“I know the Lord!”** and not obey the things the Lord has commanded.

John makes this ever so clear in one of the most beautiful passages that teach us what it means to “know the Lord.” In 1 John 2:3-4 he writes, **“And by this we may be sure that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He who says ‘I know him.’ but disobeys his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him.”** It is easy to proclaim with words, **“I know the Lord!”** It is easy to answer quickly the question put before us, **“Do you know the Lord?”** But, the true test of our knowledge is not in what we say, but in what we do. I am glad that I have difficulty answering that question in words, because the best answer is an answer of a life lived in obedience to the Lord.

It is easy to profess to know the Lord, it is a challenge to prove your knowledge by the life you live. Even in New Testament times it was easy to “profess” a knowledge of God. Paul wrote of Titus, 1:16, **“They profess to know God, but they deny him by their deeds; they are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good deed.”**

#### Relationship

Finally, knowing the Lord means coming to a close, personal relationship with him. Several times in the New Testament one runs across the phrase “the knowledge of God,” or something similar to it. In many cases it is referring to a **relationship**, rather than an intellectual knowledge of God. Perhaps one good place to see this is in Colossians 1:9-10:

And so, from the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the **knowledge of his will** in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, to lead a life worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the **knowledge of God**.

Notice in verse 9 Paul prays that they may increase in the **“knowledge of his will”**; then, in verse 10 he prays that they might increase in a **“knowledge of God.”** I see a difference. In the first he wants them to increase in their intellectual knowledge, he wants them to come to know the Bible and what it says, so to speak — book, chapter, and verse. Then, as they live what they know and a life worthy of God, pleasing to him, bearing fruit in very good work — they increase in their knowledge of God, meaning their relationship with him.

We use the same terminology today. You may ask me do I know a certain person. I may respond, **“Yes and No.”** **“Yes,”** I know his name, where he lives, and what he does for a living, what kind of car he drives, etc. I can give you all sorts of facts, but I conclude by saying, **“but, I don’t really know him.”** I don’t know him in the sense we are not good friends, we have no real relationship. After meeting someone who impresses me I might walk away saying, **“I’d like to really get to know him.”** What I want is to be his friend, know him intimately. Knowing the Lord means knowing him in the sense you have a close, personal relationship with him. An atheist can **“know his will,”** but only a Christian in love can **“know his God.”**

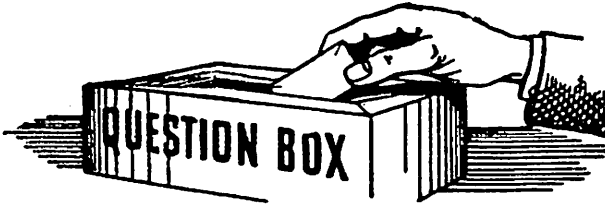
#### Like Him

Do you know the Lord? We can say, **“Yes,”** only when we learn to fear him.

We can answer, "Yes," only when we learn to obey him. We can answer, "Yes," only when we "draw near to him and he draws near to us" (James 4:8) in a close, intimate relationship.

One more brief observation. When one knows someone else in the close, intimate way what often happens is that person becomes like the person he is close to. He knows him so well he knows how he will respond in a situation, knows perhaps the exact words he will say, and can even imitate his voice and inflection. He knows him thoroughly and because he does he can imitate him. As we truly come to know Jesus Christ, it will show in our lives. As we truly come to know him, we will become like him in every way. A proof of our knowledge of God is in how well he can be seen in our lives!

C. Young.




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Conducted by  
Alf Marsden

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**"At what age can a person differentiate between right and wrong, and would this have any bearing on when they should be baptised?"**

I suppose this question may have arisen because of the tragic and much-publicised juvenile case which has recently gone through the courts; it is not my intention to join the chorus of amateur psychologists who are giving off-the-cuff solutions to problems which none of us may fully understand, but it is my intention to explore the question from a Christian point of view, because I know that it has caused some perplexity to many brethren in the past, and still does now. However, before we go any further, it may be as well to understand what we are talking about.

#### MORALITY

As far as I understand it, 'right' and 'wrong' are standards of **morality**. We say that we exercise our 'moral sense' when we have the faculty to distinguish between right and wrong. The Oxford Dictionary defines morality as, "standard of conduct respected by good men independently of positive law and religion." I suppose this definition takes us back to the time when primitive communities looked at the actions of individual members of their communities, and determined what actions should be interpreted as 'good' and conversely those that were 'bad'; that is, of course, if morality, as defined, is 'independent of positive law and religion.' Since those times, however, the law has codified what society now accepts as 'right' and 'wrong', and this may not always coincide with whatever input comes from organised religion.

This places us in somewhat of a quandary. For example, there are many in society who now believe that 'trial marriages' are good, i.e., that it is 'good' for a man and a woman to live together (with all that such a phrase connotes) so that they can find out if they are suitable for each other before they enter wedlock. Conversely, the Christian religion would say that such an arrangement was 'wrong', so we see that there is conflict between what society would allow, and what the Christian religion, according to its teaching, would define as unwise and unacceptable. The issue is further complicated by the realisation that children are much influenced by the standards which are set within their own family units, and it is quite obvious that such standards may even be below those which society as a whole would accept. The really depressing thought so far as I am concerned, is that, as standards fall from generation to generation,



actions which at one time would have been condemned by society as 'wrong', would now be construed by society as being 'right', and as governments seem to be led and not to lead, such lowered standards would easily become codified in law. It seems to me that the only reasonable answer would be to have standards which are set by higher authority than governments or society, otherwise we are in danger of finding levels lower than we have ever dreamed of. The problem for Christians is to remain uninfluenced by the society of which they are part.

It is quite obvious that standards of morality can be independent of Christianity; it is equally obvious that adherence to some moral code can never save us in the Christian sense. There are many people who live according to a strict moral code; they would be classed as 'good' people, and they are, but they make no pretensions to being Christians. A Christian, by definition, is a 'follower of Christ', and such a person looks to Christ for his ultimate salvation. So we must accept the truth of the matter: morality will not of necessity produce Christianity, but Christianity should produce, as a necessary adjunct, a system of morality. Therefore, we must not confuse Morality with Christianity from a salvation point of view. This leads us on to consider the rather complex idea as to how much 'moral sense' we can attribute to individuals of all ages, and also the 'Christian sense' which can be attributed to those who seek to obey the Gospel.

#### UNDERSTANDING

The verb 'to understand' means "to comprehend, perceive the meaning of." A secondary meaning is to "infer from information received, take as implied, take for granted." Consequently, we recognise that mental ability and agility are necessary for understanding, and that such understanding is characterised by intelligence, intellect, and insight. Hence my statement that we are dealing with a complex problem when we try to communicate ideas, some of which may be abstruse, about morality and Christianity or, indeed, about anything. Even when we believe that such ideas have been **understood**, we have to deal with the additional problem as to why they are not **applied**. Let us, first of all, examine what is implied in understanding'.

Learning takes place in the mind. Lessons, Courses, etc., are best learned by being 'structured', i.e., putting one part in place before proceeding to the next part. We proceed from the **known** to the **unknown**. It is also true that all people are different; physically, mentally, and intellectually. It is very difficult to ascertain what happens in the mind, hence examinations in schools and colleges in order to see what has been learned. Examinations, although they are a fairly crude method of assessing knowledge, are nonetheless revealing. If a pass mark is, say, 50% and I achieve it, this means that I **know** 50% of the answers, but it also means that 50% I **don't know**. Ostensibly, I have been taught to a maximum level of achievement, but the retentivity of my mind, for various reasons such as lower intellectual capacity or lack of application, has achieved its **optimum** level which is 50% lower than it should be; and this does not take into account any teaching deficiencies which may have been present. Nor does it take into account that learning certain facts for retention in the mind does not necessarily mean **understanding** them.

Now try translating what I have said up to this point to the teaching and understanding of 'right' and 'wrong.' A child of tender years might respond to parental commands such as "that's good" or "that's bad," but is unlikely to understand **why** actions are good or bad. Furthermore, just think about the **environment** of a situation. The priorities for action in any particular situation may change several times relative to the development and time-span of the situation, so that actions which might have been 'wrong' initially, may become 'right' as the situation develops. For example, if I have to attend the victim of a road accident then initially it might be 'wrong' to

move that person because of some injury, but if complications develop then it might be 'right' to move the person in order to deal with the developing situation. So apart from other complexities, 'right' and 'wrong' might seem to be in a state of flux in any situation which we may have to deal with. Standards of morality, then, are as unpredictable as the society which produces them.

#### THE AGE OF ACCOUNTABILITY

If I am 'accountable' then I am 'responsible' for my decisions, and actions based on such decisions. To make good decisions one has to understand the environment of the situation in which one finds oneself. Christians, and society, have sought to define at what age this can happen, but at best we can only have a vague idea. One 10 or 11 year-old may have insights and perceptions far beyond someone of similar age. Any analysis of age to understanding is extremely difficult.

As regards Baptism, our forefathers in the Church of Christ seem to have decided that if a candidate can answer a simple question such as "Do you believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God," and the answer is in the affirmative, then that person is a fit candidate for Baptism. If it is a child, how can that child understand how God, who is Spirit, can implant His Son in the womb of a natural woman without human intervention. That, I suggest, is a complex thought that not many adults can deal with. I also suggest that most young candidates for baptism would only fulfil the **secondary** meaning for understanding, i.e., when asked the question "Do you believe that Jesus is the Son of God?" that they would think the answer is **implied** in the question, or they would take the answer for granted, unless, of course, they had received some intensive prior instruction.

When thinking about this question my mind is driven inexorably to the scripture in Acts 8. Philip asked the eunuch, "**Understandeth** thou what thou readest?" The eunuch replied, "**How can I except some man should guide me.**" Philip then taught the eunuch about Jesus. "**They came to some water and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptised?**" Philip replied, "**If thou believest with all thy heart, thou mayest,**" to which the eunuch replied, "**I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.**" The reader will notice here that it is the **eunuch** who makes the positive declaration in response to an open-ended statement by Philip: we in the Church seem to do it the opposite way. I believe it is the duty of the Oversight of any assembly to convince themselves that Gospel responses are genuine. We can't cover **everything**, but at least we can ascertain if the person knows the extent of the commitment being made. Instant decisions have led, in many cases, to near-instant defections. If a candidate for baptism can make positive assertions about his or her faith which indicates that they **understand**, then they will have a better chance subsequently of differentiating between 'right' and 'wrong' irrespective of age.

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

### MISINTERPRETING THE WORD OF GOD

Frederick Farrar wrote, "The misinterpretation of Scripture must be reckoned among the gravest calamities of Christendom." If honest men everywhere only had a common method by which to interpret the words of the Bible then a mutual and universal understanding would prevail and a scriptural unity would immediately follow in its wake. This would be true, of course, only of those who love and honour God and His holy word.

It stands as a mystery to the author, why so little attention has been given to the science of interpretation as regards the Bible. Even our own people have not vested as heavily in this as needed. As a consequence, we have experienced many sorrows, even divisions, because Christian men misinterpreted the Scriptures and drove their misconceptions like a wedge into the body of Christ.

Again Farrar speaks: "And how often has the Bible thus been wronged ! It has been imprisoned in the cells of alien dogma; it has been bound hand and foot in the grave clothes of human tradition; it has been entombed as in a sepulchre by systems of theology, and the stone of human power has been rolled up to close its door . . ."

Another strange fact is man's weakness to know the correct approach for a sound interpretation but to be unable to overcome his own preferences in actual practice. For example this glowing truth from John Calvin. "It is the first business of an interpreter to let his author say what he does say, instead of attributing to him what we think he ought to say." Yet no man has so ignored his principle in his teaching as did Calvin.

#### **SOME MISCELLANEOUS OBSERVATIONS ON BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION**

1. Jeremy Taylor wrote, "Too many scholars have lived upon air and empty nothings, falling out about nothings and being very wise about things that are not and work not." How applicable this indictment is to modern Protestant and Catholic theologians. Sound Biblical training of prospective preachers is the best insurance against this seminary syndrome.

2. "Put nothing into the Scriptures, but draw out of them, and suffer nothing that is in them to remain hid" (J. A. Bengal). This motto should be posted on the wall of every Bible classroom and preacher's study.

3. The value of commentaries: "One great use of consulting commentaries is this, that all minds are liable to error, but not equally to the same errors. Thus the ray of truth is refracted as it enters through the dusky medium of the mind of man, but different minds having different refractive powers, we can so adjust them as to countervail the defects of our own peculiar vision, and behold correctly the distant objects which revelation discovers, and form a correct outline of the remote, though rapidly approaching realities of eternity" (James Douglas).

A serious obstacle to an objective Bible research is dependence on one or a few authorities, or authorities of all the same stripe and kind. A serious Bible student will make use of many varied authorities, always sifting carefully, to ferret out truth and discard error.

4. John Milton the Puritan poet-teacher said, "A man be an heretic in the truth, and if he believes things only because his pastor says so, or the assembly so determines, without knowing other reason, though his beliefs be true, yet the very truth he holds becomes his heresy." Though some might reject these words as too strong, they reflect the thoughts of Acts 17:11 and 1 John 4:1. We must never be content to base our faith, our interpretation of Scripture, just on the basis of what the "brotherhood" thinks, or a gospel journal, or a Christian School or a notable preacher says. We must search the Scriptures to see if the things are so. Likewise we will try the spirits (preachers) for many false prophets are gone forth.

May we dedicate ourselves to the noble search for a correct knowledge of the truth that makes men free.

J. WADDEY

## **THE DENOMINATIONS SUBSTITUTES FOR CHRISTIANITY**

### **1. - MORMONISM**

Mormonism represents one of the strangest phenomena of our time. There can be no doubt that it is founded on a delusion, and yet in just over a century it grew to a closely organized Church of 750,000 members (in the main, Salt Lake body), and has founded Salt Lake City in what was formerly little other than wilderness. Its founder was Joseph Smith, born in 1805, who in 1815 moved with his parents to Palmyra, N.Y. State. He claimed from 1820 onwards, to have been the recipient of visions which culminated in his claim to have received from an angel 1827 certain gold

plates which had been buried about A.D. 400 in the hill Cumorah. These plates contained an account in 'the ancient Egyptian' of the former inhabitants of the American continent. With the plates were delivered some 'magic spectacles' (Urim and Thummim), by which Smith translated the sheets, dictating to various amanuenses. This translation is the Book of Mormon, which was first published in 1830. Attached to it are 'The Tesimony of Three Witnesses' and 'The Testimony of Eight Witnesses,' all of whom swear to have seen the plates. The three witnesses also claim to have seen the angel. After translation the angel took the plates away. All Mormons accept the Book of Mormon as on the same level as Holy Scripture, but there is much in the system which is not in the Book of Mormon.

### *History or Myth*

According to this book, at the time of the confusion of tongues at Babel, one Jared and his relations sailed for America. They became a mighty people and warred amongst themselves. Finally about 600 B.C. they were all annihilated near the hill Cumorah. A record of all this was preserved by Ether. About the same time a group of Jews in the reign of Zedekiah, led by Lehi, arrived in America. Lehi was succeeded by Nephi. Nephi's brothers, Laman and Lemuel, set up rival kingdoms. The Lamanites had their skins turned swarthy (Red Indians) for their evil ways. Finally about A.D. 400, the Nephites were destroyed by the Lamanites near Cumorah. Moroni, the son of Mormon, hid the records in the hill before his death (the golden plates). In the record is an account of how our Lord, after his death and resurrection, appeared to the Nephites and taught them the Christian religion. It is all somewhat naive, especially in its references to the mode of Baptism and refusal of infant Baptism, which have reference to A.D. 1830 rather than A.D. 30. The Book of Mormon, which, it must be remembered, is an *inspired translation*, has quite simple grammatical errors, but through the industry of Orson Pratt and others it has become the subject of concordances, dictionaries, and commentaries explaining its discrepancies.

### *From New York to Utah*

The Church was first organised at Fayette, N.Y., with six members, half of them Smiths. In 1831 the saints moved to Kirtland, Ohio. Here the Church was named, 'The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.' In 1837 trouble arose in Kirtland over the failure of a bank run by Smith, and the saints moved to Independence, Mo. Eventually they were hounded from here and found refuge at Nauvoo, Illinois, where a Mormon legion was organised in opposition to the State Army. There was much high handed action, but eventually Smith and his brother Hyrum were cast into Carthage gaol. It is a pity that before the trial a mob broke into the gaol and murdered both. Henceforth Smith was a martyr. It is estimated that by this time there were 200,000 Mormons. After Smith's death the main body followed Brigham Young in a most amazing trek to Utah. Mormons think of it as parallel to the exodus of Israel. Here, far away from Federal Government, Young reigned almost supreme for many years. Other small groups followed Sydney Rigdon, or James Strang or Lyman Wright, only to die out. It was in Utah that Young first published the revelation on 'spiritual marriage' which he claimed had been delivered to Smith, but by him kept secret. The Reorganised Church of Latter Day Saints deny that Smith ever practised polygamy or countenanced it. They declare the revelation on 'spiritual wifehood' to be a forgery. They are a much smaller body than the Utah Mormons and in bitter opposition to them. After the arrival in Utah, polygamy became rife and was much helped by Mormon missionaries to Europe making converts of desirable women. In 1896 Utah entered the Union and polygamy became illegal, but there is little doubt that it is still practised, and if it is not then a divine revelation, in *The Book of Doctrine and Covenants*, is being violated !

*Some Beliefs and Practices.*

Much controversy surrounds the origin of Mormonism. Certainly it did not all arise in the mind of Joseph Smith. Some of it came from the better informed mind of Sydney Rigdon, who for a short time had been a Campbellite preacher. It is a system as closely organised as the Papacy and as shot through with priestcraft, though it be 'priestcraft in plain clothes.' In its whole range it is a curious mixture of ancient myths, occult practices, and modern business methods. Pre-existence as well as post-existence is taught, and the view held that every spirit is hungering to pass through this mortal life. It is therefore the duty of females to prepare their bodies for these spirits. This ancient doctrine is the foundation of 'spiritual marriage.' Readers will recognise the Campbellite element in the fact that faith, repentance and baptism are necessary to salvation, but to these three is added the 'laying on of hands' for the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Lord's Supper is administered with bread and *water*. Another peculiarity is the practice of Baptism for the Dead in the Endowment House, Salt Lake City, where people may be baptised by proxy for their dead relatives. Mormonism is no more than a *corrupt* form of Christianity, and in some respects is a religion other than Christianity, just as the religion of the Koran is other than Judaism or Christianity !

W. ROBINSON

## SCRIPTURE READINGS

Feb. 6	Hosea. 8	Gal. 6:
Feb. 13	Psa. 45:	Hebrews 1:
Feb. 20	Psa. 8:	Hebrews 2:
Feb. 27	Num. 14:26-45	Hebrews 3:

### THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

**AUTHOR:** unknown. The epistle has been ascribed to Paul, Barnabas, Luke, Apollos and various other persons. Origen once said: "Who wrote the letter to the Hebrews, only God knows."

**DATE:** uncertain, but before the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in A.D. 70.

**THOSE ADDRESSED:** Hebrew Christians or Palestinian Jews, especially to those residents of Jerusalem.

**PURPOSE:** "The great object of the apostle, therefore, in this epistle is to show the deity of Jesus Christ and the excellency of His gospel, when compared with the institutions of Moses: to prevent the Hebrews or Jewish converts from lapsing into those rites and ceremonies which were now abolished; and to point out their total insufficiency, as a means of reconciliation and atonement" (Thomas Hartwell Horne).

**KEY WORDS:** "better" and "altogether." By following the former especially, the reader will soon discover the main current of thought.

### CHAPTER I

In this first chapter, the superiority of the Son us shown.

There are seven declarations as to His power.

1. The Son has been appointed heir of all things (v.2).
2. The Son is the one by whom the worlds were made (v.2).
3. The Son is the brightness of God's glory (v.3).
4. The Son was the express image of God (v.3).
5. The Son upholds all things by the word of His power (v.3).
6. The Son purged our sins by Himself (v.3).
7. The Son sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high (v.3).

Next, seven proofs are given of Jesus' superiority over angels.

1. He has a more excellent name which is Son of God (vs.4 & 5).
2. He enjoys an exalted position (v.6).
3. He occupies a throne that is forever and ever (v.8).
4. He wields a sceptre of righteousness (v.8).
5. He has been anointed with the oil of gladness above His companions (v.9).
6. He sits at the right hand of God until His enemies are all conquered (v.23).

7. Angels are simply ministering spirits sent forth to serve the heirs of salvation (v.14), while the Son is seated at God's right hand receiving all homage.

There are quite a number of Old Testament passages quoted in this first chapter. The writer obviously knew the Hebrew scriptures well. All the time he is pointing to Jesus, the Son of God. One commentator has written: "The superiority of Jesus over prophets and angels is demonstrated in seven declarations as to His power. No other intelligent being in the universe can qualify in these respects. The fact that God has spoken to us through one so dynamic is sufficient to demand the absolute attention of all who are aware of it . . . Angels merely carried the words of God. Jesus was the Word of God. Angels bore two tablets of stone hewn out of the mountain. The Word had spoken the very mountain into existence. Angels conveyed the law to man. Jesus fulfilled the law as a man."

#### CHAPTER 2

This chapter begins with the words: **"Therefore we ought to give the most earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip."** The Greeks used the original word for "slip" to describe many things. For example, it was employed to describe what happened when a ship was carried by the current past the pier and out to sea, or when such a vessel slipped its hawser and was carried by the wind away from the harbour without the captain and crew's being aware of it. W. Carl Ketcherside has written: "One factor that makes this explanation appealing is that the word translated 'more earnest heed' also had a maritime significance. It was used to describe tying a ship securely to the dock. Perhaps the writer is saying that we need to be certain that we are properly tied and anchored, so we will not allow ourselves to be swept away and out into the spiritual deep through carelessness and indifference."

The writer speaks of **"so great salvation"** (2:2). But the point is: that it has not to be neglected. The Greek for "neglect" is *amaleo* which means "careless," and speaks of a state in which one is indifferent and unconcerned.

Dear brethren, may we never fall into that state. We must remain, at all times, diligent in the service of the Master.

We read of many miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit (2:4). This ties in with the passage in Mark 16: **"And these signs shall follow them that believe: In my name shall they cast out demons: they shall speak with new tongues: they shall take up serpents: and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them: they shall lay hands on the sick and they shall recover. So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, He was received up into heaven and sat on the right hand of God. And they went forth and preached every where, the Lord working with them and confirming the word with signs following. Amen."** (16:17 - 20). The miracles, wonders and signs (they all refer to the same thing) were given to confirm the apostolic testimony. As one writer put it: **"The signs following"** are the credentials, the only kind of credentials that would serve the purpose. One who bears a supernatural message needs supernatural confirmation of his claims."

In this chapter we read of Jesus' complete identification with sinful mankind. He knows "the heartache and the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to," as Shakespeare put it. The Hebrew writer put it better: **"For in that He Himself has suffered being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted"** (2:18). The problem of suffering is a difficult one, but Jesus helps us address it.

#### HEBREWS CHAPTER 3

This chapter can be divided into two: **"Jesus Greater Than Moses"** (1 - 6); **"Warning Against Unbelief"** (7 - 19). In it there is a quotation from Psalm 95:7-11 and references to a rebellious incident in the pilgrimage of the children of Israel (Exodus 17:1-7; Numbers 20:1-13).

Moses stands unique in the history of the Jews. He was the man to whom God spoke face to face. He was the man who received the Ten commandments, the very law of God. As one writer has put it: **"To the Jew it would have been impossible to conceive that anyone ever stood closer to God than Moses did, and yet that is precisely what the writer of the Hebrews sets out to prove."**

Jesus is described as "the apostle and high priest whom we confess" (3:1). The word apostle is from the Greek word *apostolos* and means "one who is sent forth." The word frequently meant "ambassador." An ambassador is one who is clothed with all the authority of the king who sends him. In other words, he is one who has the right credentials and speaks for his king in a foreign land. So we can say the Jesus came with the voice of God and in Him God speaks. The title High Priest is also significant. Remember, the approach to God in Judaism was through the high priest. It was the high priest alone who entered the Holy of Holies each year to make atonement for the people. To fulfil the Law, Jesus offered Himself as the perfect atonement.

Jesus, therefore, is shown to be greater than Moses. Barclay has written: "Now Moses was only part of God's universe, part of the house. But Jesus is the creator of the house and the creator is bound to stand above the house itself. Moses did not create the law; he only mediated it. Moses did not create the house; he only served in it . . . Moses, in short, was the servant, but Jesus was the Son. Moses knew a little about God; Jesus was God. Therein lies the secret of his superiority."

IAN S. DAVIDSON,  
Motherwell.

## OBITUARIES

**Wallacestone:** It is with very great sense of loss that the Church at Wallacestone records the sudden death of Bro. Tom Read. Tom passed away quietly at home on Tuesday, 30th November. He will be very badly missed by us, as he was ever present, and went about all that he did in such an inconspicuous fashion that it was often not seen. Baptised on the 26th of August, 1956, he served the Church as Treasurer and participated in every other aspect of the Church's duties. It is only now that what he did will be appreciated to the full.

He died at the age of 61 and was laid to rest on Saturday, 4th December, Bro. Ian Davidson officiating both at the home and the crematorium. We thank Bro. Ian for all his help at this difficult

time. Our sincere sympathy goes out to Sister Margaret, his wife, his daughter Paula and his 99 year-old mother, Nellie on his untimely passing. We commend them to the God of all consolation.

JAMES GRANT, Secretary.

**Motherwell:** We report the death of our beloved sister in the Lord, Janet Nimmo Purcell, at the age of eighty-five. Sister Nettie was the last of the six Sneddon girls, the renowned family of John and Margaret Sneddon. She was a faithful member of this congregation for as long as most of us can remember. She had, in fact, been baptised in Whiteinch, Glasgow in 1922. So began a life of deep commitment to Jesus, which was an example to all who knew her. For fifty-six years she was married to our late brother Leslie Purcell and they were truly a "Priscilla and Aquila" team for the Lord. They were well-known for their hospitality at Union Street and Addie Street in Motherwell. Our sympathies go to their immediate family — Billy, Margery, John and Isabelle. The well-attended funeral was conducted by brother Ian Davidson, both at the meeting house and the Airbles Cemetery. Brother David Chalmers of New Cumnock congregation offered the prayer at the graveside. Sister Nettie will be greatly missed, but we are all glad that her suffering is over and that she is now with Jesus, which is far better. We thank God for her life and faith.

IAN S. DAVIDSON

**Hereford:** David Wilson Sharples died at his home on October 31st. He had suffered increasingly since having a heart bypass operation about eight years ago, but when the end came it was mercifully quick. As he used to say "God's timing is always perfect" and we are much comforted by the thought that 'we know whom we have believed and are persuaded that He is able to keep that which we've committed unto Him against that Day'

We weep not for him who is safe in God's loving care. Our tears are for his family who miss him and for those who don't 'know Him who is able to save to the uttermost those who come to God

through Him, since He ever lives to make intercession for them.’  
 ‘Thine be the glory risen conquering Son  
 Endless is the victory Thou o’er death  
 has won.’

Sister SPRAKE.

## NEWS FROM THE CHURCHES

**Kirkcaldy** Rejoice with us. On the 7th November, 1993, Margaret Stevenson was baptised. Also on this day we welcomed into fellowship Jim Campbell and David Wilson. May the Lord richly bless lives in His service.

RUTH MOYES

**Slamannan District:** The Quarterly Mutual Benefit Meeting of the District took place in Tranent Meetinghouse on Saturday, 11th December, when the subject discussed was “Do we believe it is the mind of God to have Elders and Deacons in the Church: if so why are there so few in evidence today?” The Chairman was John Kneller, Tranent, and the speakers were James R. Gardiner, Haddington and Ian Davidson, Motherwell. As usual an hour’s discussion followed the speakers and much interest was raised on this important issue. God willing, our next meeting will be on 5th March, 1994 when the subject will be “When we are baptised into Christ are we brethren in Him, or does it depend on what we practise.” The Chairman will be Joe Malcolm and the speakers will be Harry McGinn, New Cumnock, and Graeme

Pearson, Dunfermline. The meeting will be held in Dennyloanhead. We thank the Church at Tranent for their hospitality: at short notice.

H. MCGINN, Secretary.

## GHANA APPEAL

In the past month there were two baptisms in a congregation in the Ashanti region. One candidate who is 40 years old also received help in restoring his sight through the Church Medical Fund. The daughter of an enthusiastic preacher of the Word had a very fortunate escape in a road accident when she was propelled through the air having been hit by a bus and was caught in the arms of a nearby pedestrian. She has fully recovered having received good medical attention.

Church building in Ghana has considerably progressed. This is important as suitable rented accommodation is very scarce. In the past month, Bibles, clothes and glasses as well as money has been sent out.

There is a brother who has set up a school for the training of children. This provides an excellent environment for the nurturing of the children and any help, financial, toys or books would be greatly appreciated.

Anyone wishing to help these appeals, please write to —

Graeme Pearson (Ghana Appeal)  
 13 Fairways,  
 Dunfermline,  
 Fife. KY12 0DU.  
 Tel.: 0383 728624

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EDITOR: JAMES R. GARDINER, 87 Main Street, Pathhead, Midlothian,  
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