

The SCRIPTURE STANDARD

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

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ALMOST - BUT NOT QUITE

During a conversation with a Scribe Jesus revealed that there are people in this world who are **not far** from the kingdom of heaven. The Scribe had asked a question hoping to trap and discredit Jesus, but was so impressed with Christ's reply, that he was quick to admit that he had been won over by the obvious wisdom of the answer. Jesus warned to the integrity of the man and said, "**Thou art not far from the Kingdom of God.**" (Mark 12:32). The Scribe had been perceptive enough to recognise the truth when he saw it, and honourable enough to admit it. There is hope for all such; of entering the Kingdom of God .

This remark of Jesus that the man was 'not far' from the kingdom indicates, of course, that neither was the man in the kingdom. He was not far from it but **certainly not in it**. This suggests, surely, that there is a **set demarcation line** which must be crossed ere we can enter God's kingdom. Jesus could just as easily have said, "Glad to see you in the Kingdom" but He didn't. Clearly the Scribe had an *attitude* of mind necessary to entry, but had not yet crossed the boundary line. Paul could say to the Christians at Colosse that "**they had been delivered from the power of darkness and had been translated (transferred or transported) into the Kingdom of God's dear Son.**"* (Col. 1:13). They had crossed the line from the camp of Satan into the Kingdom of Christ. **How far away was the Scribe? We cannot tell but Jesus said he was 'Not far'.**

There must be countless thousands of fine men and women who live and die in a state similar to that of the Scribe's: i.e. not far from, but not in, the kingdom of God. There must be countless thousands of good people, who, with a little encouragement and knowledge, would readily enter the Kingdom: but the problem seems to be in reaching them. It surely must be a profitable exercise for us to identify and contemplate the reasons why men and women shy away from crossing the threshold. Some, I suppose, feel that they are quite as good (and in some cases much better) than the average church-goer and feel, therefore, that, effectually, they are already in the kingdom. Some feel, no doubt, that living the 'Christian' life would be much too difficult and they hope to throw themselves upon God's mercy on Judgement Day. Apart from those 'too good' and those 'too bad', there are those who, through foolish pride, fear what family and friends might say. There are those bewildered by the many discordant voices of the religious world, and not knowing what to believe, end up suspicious of all sects and denominations. There are also those who are completely 'turned off' by religious division: and those completely indifferent to any suggestion that they ought to change their present life-style. There may also be many who think that a 'decent' life is equal to being in God's kingdom: and those who would enter but don't know how. In the hope that this magazine may be read by someone described above (i.e. not far from the

Kingdom) I offer the following remarks on the *modus operandi* of crossing the boundary line into the Kingdom of God.

DESIRE

Firstly, a very strong desire to enter must be present. This may seem self-evident but if such a desire is not present in some strength, all that follows will be flawed. The attitude of the penitent must be, "**Speak Lord, for thy servant heareth**" and we must regard God as the potter and we the clay. We must also be prepared to enter the kingdom on **God's terms** and not seek to enter on our own conditions. These terms are set in concrete in the New Testament and have been *non-negotiable* for the last 2,000 years. Christ is the appointed Lawgiver and we must acknowledge Him in all things, with humility and great deference. He who wishes to stipulate his own conditions of entry into the kingdom will never enter, but manifests an attitude quite unlike the Scribe's, and distances himself from the possibility of ever gaining admittance.

Likewise, the desire must be genuine and solely motivated by an eagerness to become a servant of Christ. It is not unknown for some to 'join the church' to please parents, to appear respectable to employers, or to reach some member of the opposite sex in the congregation. It is also not unknown for some parents to threaten to drop beneficiaries from their last Will and Testament, unless such beneficiaries become members of the Church.

FAITH

The rich usually have access to all the best things in life, but we can thank God that, in this question, the abjectly poor have as ready access to the Kingdom as any others. All that is required is a true and very strong belief in God. "**He that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.**" (Heb. 11:6). "**Without faith it is impossible to please God.**" The poor victims of the Slave Trade were subjected to great poverty, and cruelty, in the cotton fields, yet God's praise was ever on their lips and their faith in God was an inspiration to us all. Many Jews, of course, believed in God but that was not enough. Jesus said, "**Ye believe in God, believe also in Me.**" We must not only believe in the only true and living God, but we must also confess that Christ is His only Son and our Saviour. John 3:16 is a very well known passage of scripture but the verses which follow are equally important, "**For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world: but that the world through Him might be saved, He that believeth on Him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.**" (v. 17,18)

From this it surely follows that atheists and all sceptics, who remain in that condition, have no prospects of entering the Kingdom. Active faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is absolutely prerequisite. Indeed it is so vital that Jesus Himself said that those who do not believe on the Son are **condemned already**: condemned even now, before the Judgement.

"Ye believe in God: believe also in Me."

REPENTANCE

To cross the borderline between the realms of Satan and the Kingdom of Christ requires, quite obviously, that we leave our 'past' behind and mend our ways accordingly. We can't expect to behave in the Kingdom of God as we did in the service of the devil. We cannot serve God and Mammon. In short, we must revise our former life-style and repent of our previous mode of conduct.

This is surely not a mystery, but plain common sense. A great deal has been written about 'repentance' but perhaps the best and shortest definition of the term was given in Christ's instructions to the woman taken in adultery, "**Go and sin no more**". John The Baptist administered the "baptism of repentance" and those who thronged to receive his baptism were required to confess their sins and to show some evidence of contrition. This

did not deter the multitudes who were 'not far' from the Kingdom and they came in their thousands: including the whole city of Jerusalem, Judea and the entire region round about Jordan. Such was their consuming **desire** to enter the kingdom that they were more than happy to hike the many miles to where John was, and then to search for him in the wilderness. This illustrates, perhaps, the intensity of their desire to enter, and is worth noting.

To those who enquired of John as to *what form* their repentance should take (for they already believed in God), and what would constitute evidence of such repentance, John suggested that he who had two coats should give one to him who had none. Likewise he who had surplus of bread should give to those who had none. The Publicans received the charge that they should only exact the correct amount of taxation from the people. The soldiers were instructed to do violence to no man; neither to make any false charges against any. (Luke 3:10-14). Thus, those intent upon entering the kingdom had to change from being selfish, and self-centred, to being liberal with belongings: sharing their bread and their possessions. Those, like the Publicans, whose stock-in-trade was deceit and falsehood had to revert to honesty and fair trading. And those, like the soldiers, who were men of violence, had to espouse gentleness and fairness in all their dealings. There must be few indeed who cannot see the sense in 'repentance'. The kingdom of God was no place for violence, cruelty, robbery, villainy or roguery. All these things had to be left behind in the kingdom of darkness. And Peter reminds us that we must not return to these things (2 Peter 2:22) as the dog returns to its vomit, and the sow that was washed to its wallowing in the mire.

BAPTISM

Entry into the Kingdom is marked by a **conscious act** which declares to the world that we have crossed the boundary-line: i.e. our immersion in the waters of baptism. It is not only necessary that the future life-style must improve; but also that the sins of the former mode of life be dealt with and erased. We have blotted our copy books and must start afresh with a new page. We must wipe the slate clean and start afresh. Christ came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. The blood of Christ can cleanse all types and forms of sin, and a man cannot be too deeply-dyed in sin to enter the Kingdom. The dregs of humanity entered (and still enter) the Kingdom and this included robbers, murderers, thieves, prostitutes, homosexuals, liars and the like, and all had to be **washed clean**, to start life afresh, as guiltless as new-born babes. How can such a marvellous change be accomplished? How can such a thing be possible?

It not only **can be accomplished** but **is accomplished** by the power of God, the blood of Christ, and by the baptism of the penitent in the watery grave. Even Paul himself, as he agonised over the enormity of his sins (especially against the Christians) was instructed by Ananias to "**Arise and be baptised, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.**" (Acts 22:16). The apostle Peter called upon those who had murdered the Christ to "**Repent and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.**" The abrogation of our sins, and the gift of the Spirit, fall to us upon our willing submission to the holy ordinance of baptism. This is the "new birth" spoken of by Jesus when He said, "**Ye must be born again. Except a man be born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter the Kingdom of heaven.**" (John 3:5). And so we must all be reborn in a spiritual sense: of water and the spirit. Paul reminded the Christians at Corinth that evil men will not inherit the Kingdom of heaven and adds, "**And such were some of you; but ye are washed: but ye are sanctified: but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus,**" (1 Cor. 6:9-11). And so, by the grace and power of God, it is easily possible to **wash away** our sins, by baptism, no matter how degenerate and evil we may have become. Few can have been as wicked as the Christians at Corinth

and yet Paul says that they had been washed clean; and had thereby been sanctified and justified.

In effect, before we can enter the kingdom of God we must have a bath: not for the cleansing of the physical body but the soul. Very few of the thousands who were baptised in the Jordan came out of the water with clean bodies, for the river was muddy and dirty, but their souls had been cleansed whiter than white, clean and bright, and they came forth as innocent as the newly-born. Paul calls baptism "**the bath of regeneration**" and says in Titus (3:5) "**Not by the works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy God saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.**" "Washing" is from the Greek *loutron*, (and occurs only twice in the N.T.) and means "a laver or a bath." "Regeneration" also occurs only twice: (here in Matt 19:28) and is from the Greek *paligge* which means "a recreation, rebirth or regeneration." Thus "the washing of regeneration literally means "**the bath of rebirth.**" This indeed how MacKnight renders it and applies it to baptism (as indeed do all Bible scholars of any repute).

And so, in order to enter the Kingdom of God we must cancel out all our unrighteousness of the past, and wash away our sins in the waters of holy baptism. We must be immersed in the 'bath of regeneration' and be 'born again' (of water and the Spirit) and emerge from the watery grave to walk in newness of life. (see also Rom. 6). Sadly, this wonderful and priceless offer, from a benevolent and gracious God goes largely unheeded, and thousands upon thousands die in their sins.

ALMOST OR ALTOGETHER

Jesus commended the attitude of the Scribe and suggested that he was "Not far from the kingdom." We don't know how far away he was but he was "not far." We hear no more about the Scribe and so we don't know whether he entered the kingdom or not. It may well be that he died in a state of being "not far" from but not actually in, the Church. Tragically, many fine people are in a similar situation: not far from, but not in, the Kingdom and who die in that condition. That should worry us, Bengel says, "If thou art not far from the Kingdom then enter it: otherwise it were better if thou wert afar off" and I suppose this is very true if we think about it. There is really no merit in being "not far" from the Kingdom if we never enter it: we would be as well to be miles from it. In like manner, I suppose, when Paul had preached the gospel to King Agrippa, the king said, "**Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.**" "Almost" is not good enough and, of course, avails nothing. Those who are *almost* Christians will *almost* be saved and will *almost* go to heaven. As the hymnwriter expressed it:-

"Almost persuaded" now to believe,
 "Almost persuaded" Christ to receive,
 Almost, can not avail;
 Almost, is but to fail;
 Sad, Sad, the bitter wail,
 "Almost" but lost.

Paul's reply to the king was "**I would to God, that not only thou, but all that hear me this day, were both almost and altogether such as I am . . .**" Not almost as a Christian but altogether one. This was Paul's wish and prayer. May God bless and help all those in the 'not far' category to have the strength and wisdom to take that decisive step over the boundary line; leave the service of Satan and be translated, or transported, into the Kingdom of God's dear Son. "**Seek and ye shall find,**" but we must *seek*.

GLEANINGS

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

JESUS BIDS US SHINE

JESUS SAID

"Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.

Let your light so shine"

Matthew 5:15,16

"Jesus bids us shine with a pure, clear light;
Like a little candle burning in the night,
In this world of darkness, so we must shine -
You in your small corner, and I in mine."

THE BIBLE SPEAKS

"Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning." Luke 12:35

"Among whom ye shine as lights in the world" Philipians 2:15

"But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the spirit of the Lord."

2 Corinthians 3:18

"The skin of his face shone:" Exodus 34:30

"Hath shined in our hearts." 2 Corinthians 4:6

"Ye shine as lights in the world:" Philipians 2:15

WHAT IT REFLECTS

"In looking into a mirror, one does not see the mirror, or think of it, but only of what it reflects. For a mirror never calls attention to itself - except when there are flaws in it."

- Drummond

REFLECTORS

"Rejoicing in that fadeless light, reflectors we shall be;
While walking with Him we become like Him whose face we see."

WISE WORDS

Note the little word SO - "Let your light SO SHINE before men."

"I tried to be a sceptic when I was a young man," said Cecil,
"but my mother's life was too much for me."

"Walk as children of light." Ephesians 5:8

"My brethren," said an old African preacher, "a good example is the tallest kind of preaching."

"No man, when he hath lighted a candle, putteth it in a secret place, neither under a bushel, but on a candlestick, that they which come in may see the light." Luke 11:33

"O light of light! within us dwell, through us Thy radiance pour, That word and life Thy truths may tell, and praise Thee evermore."

"By looking to Jesus, like Him thou shalt be;
Thy friends in thy conduct, His likeness shall see."

TALES WORTH TELLING

Biographers of Fenelon tell us that he lived in such intimate fellowship with God that his face shone. Lord Peterborough, a sceptic, was obliged to spend a night with him in an inn. In the morning he rushed away saying, "If I stay another night with that man, I shall be a Christian in spite of myself." Someone else has said of him, "His manners were full of grace; his voice of love, and his face full of glory." C.G.

GLEANINGS

"It's worth living to know 'at you can 'elp a bit, and I'd sooner burn my candle nor save it, and I only wish you'd put a match to yours. I'm capped you can't get out o' your doldrums, but you never will while you take a pleasure in 'em. You can say as you like, but you'd be fair mis'rable if you'd naught to grumble about. As for bearing it, you've got to bear it. Whether you can or your can't, and if you was to think o' lightening some'dy else's load 'stead of' groaning 'em having so much to carry it 'ud seem you better." W. Riley

May the brightness of Thy Glory
So shine forth that men may see
Not myself, but Jesus only,
Shining forth to them from me.
Jesus, source of Light Divine,
Shine within this heart of mine.

Tom Kemp

Selected by Leonard Morgan

THE BREADTH OF GOD'S LOVE

"Wide, wide as the ocean; high as the heavens above; deep, deep as the deepest sea - is my Saviour's love!" So the children sing of a concept wonderful to realize: God's love for you and me.

But while we rejoice in that love and depend upon that love, it is hard for us to realize its breadth, its extent, to whom it applies. While we want it and need it, we have problems recognising that some who seem especially "unworthy" have a right to it. They don't "deserve" it, we think. After all, look at their evil, cruel, grossly immoral actions. How could God have patience with them or consider forgiving them? Such was Jonah's problem.

JONAH'S PROBLEM

Jonah was a prophet to the northern kingdom of Israel during the reign of Jereboam II (786-746 B.C.). He had likely become somewhat of a national hero through prophesying a successful national expansion under Jereboam II (II Kings 14:25). What we know about him indicates that he was a person of no little courage or determination.

Then came that distasteful command. "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before me" (Jonah 1:2). Nineveh was the capital city of Assyria, long a world-power and a definite threat to the very existence of Israel. Indeed, it might be said that Assyria was a threat to all that was decent in the world. "It's atrocities were proverbial, as the records and art left by its kings make quite clear . . . Nineveh saw men and nations as tools to be exploited to gratify the lust of conquest and

commercialism. Assyria existed to render no service to mankind" (Jack Lewis, **The Minor Prophets**. 55). J.H. Morrison describes the Assyrian army as "a horde of indisciplined savages whose chief delights were to plunder, ravish, and torture. With his own hands their king would gouge out the eyes of noble captives, then perhaps flay them alive and peg them to the ground to perish" (Quoted by Leslie Thomas "Nahum", **The Old Testament Books and Their Messages in the Christian Age**, 430).

We can imagine what Jonah thought about the command to preach to Nineveh. Nineveh deserved *judgement*, certainly, but they didn't deserve warning. They didn't deserve the chance to know their fate and perhaps turn from it. Nineveh needed to be destroyed, not preached to! Jonah shuddered at the thought that preaching might produce repentance and that repentance might trigger the love and mercy of God. Imagine God deciding to have mercy on this city!

So Jonah made his decision, hard as it was. In his heart, to preach to Nineveh would be to be disloyal to his country and to his people. He decided that he could not do it. He would turn from the will of God and abandon his work as a prophet, rather than aid this vicious national enemy. Love for country, for family, would this time have to come before the command of God!

As we picture Jonah heading for Joppa to board a ship, we should see him as heavy of heart - a lost man in his own eyes. God has asked too much this time. He just could not go that far! "His motive was not ignoble. Nevertheless, it shows how even the best of intentions may stand in the way of complete obedience to the Lord. The trouble with Jonah was one that affects many a Christian today; it was simply refusal to do the will of God for fear of the consequences. How much better to follow God in everything, realizing that He knows exactly what He is doing and that the consequences are well in His control. When God calls us to a thing, worry over the outcome is one of the snares the adversary uses to keep us from obeying".

THE HOUND OF HEAVEN

Jonah's decision is put into action as he boards a ship for Tarshish (usually identified as in Spain). God said "Go east" but Jonah goes west! "Away from the presence of the Lord" (1:3). Really? No, not really, and he knows it (1:9). But if he is to reject duty, to deny the will of God, he must separate himself from the scene of responsibility, the place of duty. That will mean separation from his homeland, his people, and from all those things that remind him of God and of his work as a prophet. He can't really get away from God but he can get away from all those things that remind him of God.

It is not unusual today to see a person attempt what Jonah attempted. When the will of God is rejected, when obedience and service are turned from, there often follows a separation from those things which remind of God, duty, service. This means an avoidance of worship, the brethren, certain friends, perhaps even certain topics of conversation - anything that reminds of the broken relationship with God.

But it does not work that well! "Jonah thought he was through with God . . . But God was not through with Jonah." A person may think that they can easily abandon God, but God can in no way easily abandon any individual. The "Hound of Heaven" will pursue as long as there is hope, as long as there is a conscience, as long as it is possible that one may be turned back from self-will and self-condemnation to useful service.

There follows the storm at sea, the casting overboard, and the episode of the fish (1:4-2:10). Through it all Jonah knew who he was and what the problem was. "Take me up and throw me into the sea . . ." (1:12). Why not? He was at fault, he deserved death. If God wanted his death then God could have it. But God was not finished with Jonah: enter the fish. Why the fish? To discipline Jonah. To prepare him to preach with power. To picture, in

the distant future, the resurrection of Jesus (Matthew 12:40).

And in the fish Jonah did remember where his hope lay and to whom he had obligation (see 2:2 and 2:9). It is a shame that it sometimes takes a drastic event to shock us back into recognition of the need for God - and even then reluctantly. Jonah is brought back to obedience to God, but his heart is still not really in it!

SHOULD NOT I PITY NINEVEH?

Jonah preached, and his message though short and simple, was very clear. **"Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"** (3:4). God knew Nineveh's idolatries, its pagan vices, its cruelty and violence, and He was ready to judge it for such.

The response to Jonah's preaching is shocking: the people of this great evil city, from the king down, responded by turning from evil and violence, with fasting and the wearing of sackcloth, and with a plea to God for mercy! How do we account for this? Jesus said that Jonah was **"a sign to the men of Nineveh"** (Luke 11:30). Does this mean his experience with the fish was known? Did this convince men he was truly from God? It may be also that Jonah preached with unusual power and conviction after God's discipline - **"like a man raised from the dead"**. It may also be that God had prepared Nineveh for repentance with a severe plague (765 B.C.), a total eclipse of the sun (763) and another plague (759).

It was right that God's patience with immoral, idolatrous, violent Nineveh should have a limit - and it was right that His judgement could be averted by repentance. God has no joy in the condemnation of a people, He wants their salvation. The threat of judgement was conditional and could be averted by repentance (Jeremiah 18:7-10).

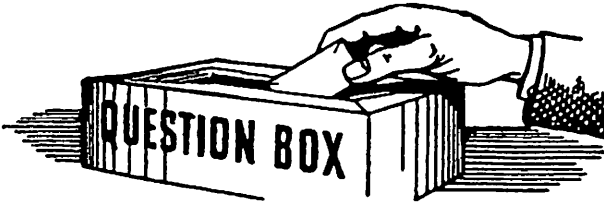
Jonah's message would well fit our society. How much more patience will God have with us? Are we more hardhearted than ancient Nineveh? Certainly we have an even stronger motive for repentance (Matthew 12:41).

Jonah became very angry with God's display of mercy to this evil city (4:1-5). He had been afraid of this all along! **"Do you do well to be angry?"** God gently tries to get him to see his selfish hatred in all of its ugliness. It is obvious that Jonah had obeyed God only in body, not in heart and spirit. Real joy and peace comes when we really and truly reconcile ourselves to the will of God. Reluctant, grudging obedience is not enough. **"O Love That Wilt Not Let Me Go!"** As Jonah sits in a booth under the hot sun and waits for the hoped-for destruction of the city, God patiently tries again to get him to understand His love and mercy (4:6-11). A plant quickly grows up to provide welcome shade, only to be destroyed by a worm. Then comes the *sirocco*, the scorching, east wind. And Jonah is so upset that he again contemplates death. **"Do you do well to be angry for the plant? . . . You pity the plant, for which you did not labour, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night, and perished in a night. And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city . . . ?"**

God used nature (the storm, the fish, the plant, the worm, the wind) to try to influence Jonah, to make him think, but He would not force change in him. Any true change would have to come from **within** Jonah. Jonah could love Israel (a nation far from righteous) - could he not love other nations, too? Jonah could pity a plant - could he not pity people, even 120,000 children? Jonah could patiently sit in the hot sun to wait for a city's destruction - could he not exercise that patience to try to save the same city?

Behold, the breadth of God's great love to His selfish, reluctant, often disobedient people - see Him seek to discipline and teach, always patient, persistent, hopeful. Behold, the breadth of God's great love for a violent, godless, immoral people - see Him patiently waiting, willing to receive and forgive. After all, He **"desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth"** (1 Timothy 2:4). **"Wide, wide as the ocean . . ."** Yes!

THE SCRIPTURE STANDARD



Conducted by
Alf Marsden

"Are there 'big sins' and 'little sins'? The N.T. seems to indicate that some sins are worse than others. Jesus said, *"It shall be more tolerable"* for some than others on Judgement Day. Would you comment, please?"

Anything which is 'tolerable' means that it has to be, or can be, endured. The mother may say to the child, "I'm not going to tolerate this sort of behaviour any longer", meaning, of course, that she isn't going to **endure** behaviour which she finds to be unsatisfactory. The machine engineer, when producing components on his lathe, has to work to certain 'tolerances'. This means that the piece of apparatus into which the component will eventually be fitted, will 'endure' a greater or lesser degree of accuracy; the drawing from which the machinist works will determine what accuracy is necessary. Therefore, I believe we can say that if something is tolerable, then we mean that it may be difficult or painful, but it can be endured. If, on the other hand, something is 'more tolerable' than something else, then in the second instance the thing to be endured is more difficult and more painful than in the first instance. I think we may be able to proceed from this point.

ASSOCIATED WORDS

The Greek word for 'tolerable' is *ANEKTOS*, and this is akin to *ANECHÔ* which means 'to endure'. The use of this word in the N.T. is quite specific. Paul says to the Thessalonian Christians, **"We ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure"**. 2 Thess. 1:4. In 2 Tim. 4:3. Paul speaks of the intolerance of those who will not heed the teaching, **"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine"**.

Another associated word is the word 'bear', signifying to support or endure as a burden. In Matt. 20 we have the account of the householder who hired labour for work in his vineyard. When the time came for the payment of wages there was grumbling from those who had worked all day because other late arrivals had been paid the same amount. In v12 it is said, **"These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne (endured) the burden and heat of the day"**. Now that we have looked at some of the scriptural implications, we can perhaps press on.

THE CITIES OF THE PLAIN

The scriptures referred to in this question are to be found in Matt. 10:15; 11:20-24. Also Luke 10:12,14.

We should not compare our cities with the cities of the days of Lot. In the Hebrew usage any collection of permanent human habitations, whether few or many, comprised a 'city'. Such cities were usually walled, and sometimes had a king. There were evidently five cities on the Plain of Jordan, of which Sodom and Gomorrah were two. When Lot separated from Abraham, he chose Sodom for his residence, and even at that time there was much wickedness in the city. Both of these cities had kings, and were probably walled with a gate. Gen. 19 says that when the two angels came at eventide, Lot was sat in the gate of Sodom. At the gates of cities, business was usually transacted.

The record states that the wickedness of Sodom must have been extreme. Lot pleaded with God to spare the city, and God said that if but five righteous people could be found then

He would spare the city; but evidently not even five righteous people could be found. The account in Gen. 19 states that when the two angels went in to lodge with Lot, the men of the city gathered outside Lot's house and demanded that the two men be sent out to them. Lot even offered his two daughters to them but that wasn't satisfactory. Consequently, the two angels told Lot to gather his family and possessions and to flee the city. As they fled, Lot begged that they would be allowed to go to another city on the Plain called Zoar; this was a small city (Zoar means 'littleness'). His request was granted. When they arrived at Zoar, God rained fire from Heaven and consumed the other cities of the Plain and the people who dwelt therein. Such was the judgement of God against their wickedness. Could there be anything greater than that punishment to endure in the days when Jesus taught?

WHAT DID JESUS MEAN?

Readers must keep the scriptures in Matt. 10 and Luke 10 before them as they study the answer I shall give.

Matthew's account speaks about the Twelve being sent out. Luke, on the other hand, speaks about the Twelve being sent out (ch.9), and the seventy-two being sent out (ch.10). In Mark 6:7-12 we have a significant difference in the account. Jesus sends out the Twelve, and the scripture says that He **"commanded them that they should take nothing for their journey, save a staff only"**. He then tells them, "But be shod with sandals" vv 8,9. Matthew and Luke records that Jesus said, **"No staff, no shoes"**. I once heard someone say that the staff and the shoes would be symbolic in reminding the Jews of the Passover. We read in Ex. 12:11, **"thus shall ye eat it; with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand: and ye shall eat it in haste: it is the Lord's Passover"**. Would it be wrong to suggest that Jesus saw His whole mission as a pilgrimage journey to Jerusalem for Passover? Be that as it may, it is true that Jesus, in His denunciation of the people of His day, is saying something fundamental. So why did Jesus speak as he did?

Let's pause for a moment and consider the advantages these people had to whom Jesus was speaking. Down the ages the prophets had told about the coming Messiah; they had even indicated that He would not be a warrior king. Then in due time the Messiah had come among them, and even though He told them who He was, they didn't recognise Him; even after the crucifixion and the resurrection some of His closest followers still doubted. Now He was giving them, we might say, a final chance by sending the Twelve among them with the Message: and Jesus doesn't mince His words here, **"He that heareth you heareth me, and he that despiseth you despiseth me, and he that despiseth me, despiseth him that sent me"** Luke 10:16. To reject the Message was to despise the Heavenly Father.

The contrast that Jesus makes now seems to make some sense. On Sodom, and on Tyre and Sidon (by-words for wickedness also), God has passed a summary judgment to death without, so it seems, the people having **any opportunity to repent**. But the people to whom Jesus was speaking were given every opportunity to repent, therefore, their culpability was **greater** than those under the Old Covenant. The people had also seen the miracles which had been done among them, and it seems quite clear that Jesus looked upon the miracles not as a means of astonishing people, but He linked them firmly with repentance. **"If the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon which have been done in you, they had a great while ago repented, sitting in sackcloth and ashes"** Luke 10:13. The summary judgment passed on Sodom was seen by Jesus to be more bearable than the judgment which was to come; **"Fear not them that kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell"**. Matt. 10:28.

A FINAL THOUGHT

I don't know what God had in mind for the souls of those summarily dealt with by him under the Old Covenant; I may speculate, but I don't know what His ultimate plans are for

such souls. There is one thing which is very clear; it must be far easier to die and enter some sort of oblivion, than it is to die and enter eternal punishment; perhaps the words of the Saviour indicate something like this. However, one thing is abundantly clear: people who are unrepentant and consequently unsaved **do know** what will happen to **their** souls. This is why the acceptance of the Gospel is so important, and the preaching of it, from our point of view, so urgent. I believe that when God dealt with people as He did under the Old Covenant His intention was to wipe wickedness off the face of the earth, and in this way to demonstrate His utter abhorrence of wickedness and rebellion against His will.

As regards 'big sins' and 'little sins' I have never quite understood the distinction. If I contravene God's law then I am guilty of sin. We Christians also ought to understand the teaching of the Bible, "**To him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin**". Personally, I know nothing of big sins or little sins; everything which goes against God's revealed word is SIN, SIN, SIN.

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

CROSSING OVER

Water has from the very beginning been used as one of the essential elements by which God chooses to bring new life into being. (Gen. 1:1-9) It is also; by God's will, authority and power; used in the process of wiping the slate clean and giving new life to a sinfully dead person. When Jesus taught he taught with this same authority and power (Luke 4:32).

The foregoing may be an overly simple explanation of a much more intricate process by which man may be reconciled to God (2nd Cor. 5:17-19), however water itself has been used throughout all ages as a means (but not of course the only means) by which man can demonstrate to both God and mankind his willingness to obey the explicit command of God (Matt. 3:13-18). We see this in the account of Noah, who built the ark on the word and instructions of God, trusting that a flood of water would come. All of which was done by Noah while being surrounded by wicked people (Gen. 6:5).

It was not mere coincidence that Abraham gave birth, unwittingly, to a name for a new nation and a name for the language that was chosen by God to record the events of the Old Testament; for he, having submitted in blind faith to the guidance and protection of God (Heb. 11:8) was led to cross over the Jordan river, whereby he, as well as his family and offspring, were referred to as "Hebrew" - the stranger who "crossed over" the Jordan (Gen. 14:13) - (*Hebrew* is derived from a prime root "abar" pronounced "aw-bar", meaning to "cross over" and involved in this is the word "eber" commonly used in Abraham's day properly - "a region across" - on the opposite side (especially of the Jordan, usually meaning the east) - *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*).

Water was an essential element in the law given to the Levitical priesthood regarding their ceremonial cleansing (Ex. 40:12).

Moving forward in the Old Testament we see that water once again plays a part in the test of men's faith and trust in God. To obtain what was promised by God these men had to trust, that what he told them was true - cross over the Jordan and overcome your enemies by force and by my power you will obtain the promised land. (Deut. 9:1-6)

There were those who were reluctant to obey the Lord. Being rich in cattle and this world's goods, they were quite comfortable to stay on the East side of the Jordan and conversation that ensued between these people (the Reubenites and Gadites) and Moses is recorded in Num. ch.32.

What has all of this got to do with us to-day and what lesson can we learn from it?

We must remember that the Old Testament is a record of real physical events and real

people, who, being part of God's plan for instructing and demonstrating his trustworthiness to all mankind, were in the main, used to portray the "pattern" or "copy", or "shadow" of the Spiritual things that follow in this New Testament age in which we live (Heb. 9:23).

The initial reluctance of the Reubenites and the Gadites to cross over the Jordan and enter into battle can be likened to those who to-day want the comfort of what this world's good men's approval can afford, and reject the clear command of the Lord to "cross over" (John 5:24).

This Spiritual "crossing over" entails the cleansing by water and the new birth obtained by obedience to the very words of Jesus Christ himself (Mark 16:16 and Rom. 6:1-4). Having obeyed we will find ourselves involved in the battle that is revealed in Ephs. 6:10-18. When we obey and continue to open our eyes and see the Spiritual place to which we have come, that promised land which we still only see by faith, we can take comfort in the words recorded in Heb. 12:22-24.

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SCRIPTURE READINGS

Nov 3	Psalm 103	1 John 4:1-12
Nov 10	Deut. 10:12-22	1 John 4:13 to 5:5
Nov 17	Psalm 115	1 John 5:6-21
Nov 24	Deut. 13	2 John

TEST THE SPIRIT

"Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone into the world" (4:1). Those of God confessed that Jesus had come in the flesh; those against God denied this fact (4:2-3). John undoubtedly had the gnostics in mind here. Their heretical teachings were a great danger to the early Church and John was vigorous in his opposition to them. One of the sects of the gnostics was known as the Docetists, who denied the humanity of Christ, teaching that he was merely a visionary being, a phantom, void of corporeal nature, and that He had not come in the flesh. Perhaps John had them especially in mind as he wrote the above words.

One of the great statements of the Bible is found in this section of the epistle: "... greater is He who is in you, than he who is in the world" (4:4). "He who is in you" is, of course the Holy Spirit; "he

who is in the world" is the evil one, "the prince of this world" (John 12:31) and "the god of this world" (2 Corinthians 4:4). "In the strength, then, of 'the Spirit whom God gave to us' (3:24) we are to fight against the influence which permeates that system of human society which lies in spiritual darkness and is organised, socially, intellectually and morally, by the evil one and his hosts, against God and His Christ" (W.E. Vine).

LOVE AND LIFE

John plainly tells us in this epistle that "God is love" (4:8,16). Incidentally, this is proof positive to me that there is more than one personality of the Godhead or Godhood. It is staggering to think that love is the dynamic power behind the universe. The universe had a beginning (Genesis 1:1), but God is eternal and He did not become love, but IS love. This is His essence. And that love is seen in perfection in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus said: "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9).

I like these words: "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another" (4:10-11). Jesus Himself once said: "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love

one to another" (John 13:35). In other words, we must love as God loves.

John further wrote: "**And this is the record, that God has given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; and he who has not the Son has not life**" (5:11-12). I used to think that eternal life was something I received when I reached heaven. I was mistaken. Eternal life is simply the life of God. One commentator has added: "It is the abundant life, the divine life. It is as unending and undying as God is. The fact that it was manifested in such a manner as to be susceptible to the sense is proof that eternal life can dwell in men of flesh upon earth. It is a relationship with the Divine and one who has the Son dwelling in him has eternal life". In the light of these words, the first few verses of this first epistle should be read and re-read. They point to Jesus, who is the Way, the Truth and the LIFE.

A SIN UNTO DEATH

We read: "**If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say he shall pray for it. All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death**" (1 John 5:16-17). This is a difficult passage of scripture, which has received much comment. Albert Barnes, for example, regarded the "sin unto death" as the unpardonable sin. So did Philip Doddridge. But the great James Macknight dissented from this interpretation. W. Carl Ketcherside once wrote this of him: "Dr. Macknight held that in the early age of Christianity, God punished some men for their sins directly with physical disease or infirmity, and in aggravated cases, with death. His position was that if someone in that age was possessed of the gift of healing saw one smitten of God and could determine that the punishment of death was not assessed, he could pray for that

person and God would honour the gift by granting life to the one so smitten".

A big question is: Does God still directly visit sickness and death upon men and women who are guilty of kindred sins? Personally, I do not think so. I agree with Ketcherside when he pointed out that "in the primitive era of the community of the called-out ones, a directness of dealing was essential. This directness is not now essential to the fulfilment of the divine purpose".

SECOND EPISTLE OF JOHN

AUTHOR: the apostle John

DATE: probably around the end of the 1st century A.D.

TO WHOM ADDRESSED: ". . . **the elect lady and her children . . .**" (verse 1). A number of commentators are of the view that "**the elect lady**" refers to a local church and "**her children**" to members of the congregation. Personally, I have always looked on 2 John as a letter sent to an individual.

PURPOSE: "2 John seems to reflect something of the same false teaching that lies behind 1 John. The letter then will be written to put its readers on their guard against it. Clearly there was some danger that the false teachers would be welcomed and thus the doctrines would spread" (Leon Morris). The first epistle deals with the general and the second and third with the particular. Remember, we must always understand the particular in the light of the general.

CONTENT: Opening Salutation (1-3); Occasion of Rejoicing (4); Exhortation (5-11); Personal Notes (12); Final Greetings (13).

Two of John's favourite words in this epistle are "**truth**" and "**love**". For example, he writes: "**Grace be with you, mercy, and peace, from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father in truth and love**" (verse 3). The fellowship of the Church is created by truth and exhibited in love. Our love

grows soft if it is not strengthened by truth; our truth grows hard if it is not softened by love. We learn here that we must love each other in the truth and hold to the truth in love. Someone once wrote: "We do not love each other because we are temperamentally compatible or because we are naturally drawn to one another, but because of the truth which we share . . . We shall never increase the love which exists between us by diminishing the truth we hold in common".

John also wrote: "For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist" (verse 7). We are immediately reminded of the words in his gospel record: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God . . . And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (John 1:1,14). My brethren, the incarnation is not only an event in history, but it is an abiding truth. Gnostics in denying that Jesus came in the flesh were denying the truth. This placed them in complete opposition to God; indeed it made them God's enemies.

John declared: "Whosoever transgresses, and abides not in the doctrine of Christ, has not God. He that abides in the doctrine of Christ, he has both the Father and the Son" (verse 9). John's words are clear: You cannot have God without Christ!

Ian S. Davidson,
Motherwell.

TEST YOUR BIBLICAL KNOWLEDGE

1. How many Pharaohs are mentioned in the Bible - 4, 8 or 12?
2. Who was the father of Joel and Abijah?

3. How long did the spies remain in Canaan?
4. How many sons did Gideon have?
5. How long did Manasseh reign?
6. What was Nimrod famous for?
7. What garment was put on Jesus at His trial?
8. Where were the two men going when Jesus met them after His resurrection?
9. In the parable of the good Samaritan, who was the second man to ignore the injured victim?
10. In which city was Paul educated?

NEWS FROM THE CHURCHES

Slamannan District: The Quarterly Mutual Benefit Meeting took place on Saturday, 7th September, at Motherwell, when the subject under discussion was "What is the Apocrypha - Why aren't these books found in our Bibles"? The speakers were Bro. John Colgan, Tranent, and Bro. Graeme Pearson, Dunfermline. In the chair at short notice was Bro. James R, Gardiner. As usual the subject was very ably dealt with by the two speakers and in the hour's discussion which followed a great many interesting points were raised.

Our next meeting, God willing, will be on 7th December, at Tranent, when the subject will be "How should we view the practice of sisters serving at the Lord's Table? By doing so, a sister would not be teaching. Would she, therefore, violate scriptures"? The speakers will be Bro. John Kneller and Mark Plain, both of Tranent, as will be chairman, Bro. John Colgan. We look forward to another occasion of interest and fellowship together. We thank the good sisters at Motherwell for the excellent hospitality.

Harry McGinn. (Sec)

Lucknow, India: We were pleased to learn from Bro. Aziz Masih, Lucknow, India, that his daughter Shireen, who had

been seriously ill has made a full recovery. Shireen is to marry Arun James on the 16th October at the church building in Lucknow. We wish them every happiness in their new life together, and pray that they will find long faithful service to Christ in His Church.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS

Brother David Chalmers has moved to:-
127 Riverside Place,
Ayr, KA8 0EB.
Telephone: 01292 266198

COMING EVENTS

(For your diary)

ANNUAL SOCIAL

at Newtongrange, will, God willing,
take place on
SATURDAY, 12th OCTOBER, 1996
at 4.00 p.m.

The format for the Social will be slightly different this year. Our speakers are brothers Graeme Pearson and Bill Cook, who will give lessons on their recent Ghanaian experience.

We will also be having community singing and choir participation. The hymns to be sung will be culled from the new Favourite Hymns of the Church hymn book.

The timetable for the afternoon will be as follows:

- 4.00 p.m. Tea
- 5.00 p.m. Community Singing
- 5.30 p.m. First Speaker
- 6.00 p.m. Interval
- 6.20 p.m. Community Singing
- 6.30 p.m. Second Speaker
- 7.00 p.m. Community Singing
- 7.15 p.m. Close/Refreshments

A warm welcome is extended to all.

ANNIVERSARY MEETING

125th Anniversary at Kentish Town
on SATURDAY, 12th OCTOBER, 1996

3.00 p.m. and 6.00 p.m.

Tea at 4.45 p.m.

Speaker: Jon Glessinger

GHANA APPEAL

We wish to dedicate this month's report to the plight of brethren in Odumasi Church of Christ, and present this special appeal on their behalf.

As mentioned in our recent reports, the church at Odumasi worships in the block-walls of their uncompleted meeting place which is under construction. They used palm branches (leaves) to shelter themselves from the effect of the scorching sun. However, this can't protect them against the heavy rains this year. The church has now been displaced and worships under the open veranda of an office at the benevolence of someone, possibly until the end of the rains or the completion of the roofing.

We see their plight as of special concern for obvious reasons. You see, many churches and individual Christians have already donated so much towards the blockwork of that building. What is left now is to put a roof over the blocks. May we all not generously put our hand on deck to "lift up" a roof over that structure in the next months to give some comfort to those unfortunate brethren? We know the will to serve the Lord in sacrificial giving abounds so much in our hearts.

Please make cheques payable to Graeme Pearson (Ghana Appeal), and send to G. Pearson, 13 Fairways, Dunfermline, Fife, KY12 0DU. Scotland. Tel: 01383 728624.

Wisdom Kpehor

A MINUTE

Time is Money, or Is It?

Where did we get the idea that time is money? Possibly from Benjamin Franklin, but we didn't get it from the Bible. The

Bible has a lot to say about the stewardship of money, the danger of the love of money and unfair practices connected with money; false weights, usury, and holding back wages from workers. But the Bible does not say that time is money.

So what's the problem? Just this. When we equate time and money we put a price on time so that we feel obligated to do cost accounting for how we spend our time. I know people who "never take a vacation". Time is too valuable, they say. One cannot waste it on vacations. I wonder, can we waste it on prayer, Bible study, calling on the sick, climbing a mountain to see the sunset, or helping a neighbour kid fix his bike.

If I give dollar values to minutes, hours and days, then I'll apply a standard for evaluating life that pressures me and distorts my vision and my priorities.

When a child asks some time from his father and his father gives him some money to go swimming, or to go to the theatre, or to buy some skates, isn't he giving a stone for bread and a scorpion for the egg? (Luke 11:9-13). Can a pretty gift, flowers, candy, or a new dress compensate a wife and mother for the loneliness she feels when dad is concerned so much for converting time into money that he has no time for her and the family she is left to care for?

Time is not money. And money is not time. No amount of money can buy off death. Time comes in the same package for all of us, twenty-four hours in each day for each one of us; money isn't equal for us all.

If I get hooked on converting time into money, then I can't convert it into other currencies: friendship, quietness, reading, painting, appreciation, or prayer. When we cross borders into other countries we convert our currencies. In the same way, when we cross into areas of life not measured by dollar values, our time is converted into those currencies. We can't travel freely into those lands with just money.

Time can converted into money. That's true. But it's a very limited view of life that sees money as the only currency conversion for time.

-
1. 12.
 2. Samuel (1 Samuel 8:1-2).
 3. Forty days (Numbers 13:25)
 4. Seventy one (Judges 8:30,31).
 5. Fifty five years (2 Kings 21:1).
 6. Hunting (Genesis 10:8).
 7. A purple robe (Mark 15:17).
 8. Emmaus (Luke 24:13).
 9. The Levite (Luke 10:32).
 10. Jerusalem (Acts 22:3).

ANSWERS

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