

The SCRIPTURE STANDARD

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

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THE BARREN FIG TREE

Although the Roman Legions which occupied and dominated Palestine (and much of the world) in Christ's time, were fairly sympathetic towards the Jews in that they allowed them freedom of worship, yet friction occasionally manifested itself. In Luke 13 we read that for some reason or other Pilate had been angered by some Galileans and had sent his soldiers to punish them. Apparently the soldiers slew some of them as they worshipped God and sacrificed, thus mingling their blood with the blood of the sacrificed animals. Some Jews brought the news of Pilate's misdeed to the ears of Jesus wondering what His response might be, especially as Jesus Himself was a Galilean. Those who brought the news seemed to think that this calamity had overtaken these Galileans because of special sins of which they have been guilty. Jesus dismisses such a thought and to stress His point introduces another tragedy which had recently occurred in that locality, i.e. the sudden falling of the Tower of Siloam which crushed eighteen people to death. "Suppose ye," said Jesus, "That these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay, but except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen, upon whom the Tower of Siloam fell, and slew the, that they were sinners above all men that dwell in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay, but except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish." The employment of the word "likewise" (i.e. "Likewise perish") was, of course, an awesome prediction regarding the impending destruction of Jerusalem and the death of so many Jews by the Roman sword and the falling of Jerusalem masonry.

This conversation regarding these hapless Galileans prompted Jesus to speak the following parable, "A certain man had a fig tree planted in a vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he to the dresser of his vineyard, Behold those three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree and find none; cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground. And he answered and said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it. And if it bear fruit, well. And if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down." The parable was, of course, in emphasis of His remarks that the Jews listening to Him were just as wicked as the Galileans slain by Pilate or those crushed by the Siloam Tower and that the Jewish nation were receiving their last chance to return to God.

The first few words of the parable constitute a brilliant description of the special favours God had bestowed upon the Jews — "A certain man had a fig tree planted in a vineyard." Old Testament history completely confirms how God had selected

Israel as a people for His own possession, how He nourished, nurtured and cherished her, rescued her from slavery, fought her battles and gave her a land flowing with milk and honey; cared for like a fig tree in a vineyard. But what a barren fig tree Israel proved to be. God received no love in return and sometimes scant respect — indeed Israel often sought to join those who worshipped “gods” of wood and stone. In the parable we “listen in” to a conversation between the owner and the husbandman and find that when the owner complains of the tree’s barrenness and suggests that it be chopped down the husbandman asks for a reprieve of one year during which he would dig around it and dung it. If after that, it remained fruitless, then it should be cut down. God obviously is referred as the owner, Jesus the husbandman and Christ’s ministry amongst His people as the “digging and dunging” period — Israel’s last chance. This was doubtless why, during Christ’s ministry His disciples went only to the “lost sheep of the House of Israel” with the news of the kingdom of God.

Secular history as well as the New Testament tells us that the effort was of no avail and the Jews were not disposed, by and large, to contemplate any such thing as repentance. At the end of our Lord’s efforts He could but tearfully lament, Oh Jerusalem, Oh Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not. Behold your house is left unto you desolate . . .” Not only did they not respond to the ministrations of the kindly husbandman who had won them a last opportunity but in fact they slew the husbandman — God’s final prophet. “Away with Him, away with Him” they cried. “Crucify Him, Crucify Him,” they shrieked. “His blood be upon us and upon our children,” they chanted. And as Jesus was led away to be crucified we read “that there followed Him a great company of people and of women which also bewailed Him and lamented Him. But Jesus turning unto them said, Daughters of Jerusalem weep not for me but weep for yourselves and for your children. For behold the days are coming when ye shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare and the breasts that never gave suck.” Jesus was referring, of course, to the fearful and horrifying events some thirty years later (70 A.D.) when the holy city, Jerusalem, and all its inhabitants were destroyed by the Roman armies under Titus. Josephus, the historian, tells of the awful conditions of the long siege and how rich Jewesses ate camel dung and even their own children. The barren fig tree had not responded to Divine Husbandman and so was cut down. Jesus described the fall as “great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.” Matt. 24:21.

There are of course, many other parables and incidents through which Jesus gave due notice to the Jews that “the kingdom of God shall be taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof” e.g. the parable of the two sons, the parable of the vineyard, and the cursing of the fig tree (all Matt. 21), the parable of the great supper (Luke 14) and the parable of the wedding feast (Matt. 22).

These parables should convince those who believe that the Throne of David will once again be set up in Jerusalem that such an idea is foolishly romantic and that God will never again have a “chosen race” in any special geographical location, least of all Palestine. But surely the parables also provide a very real warning to spiritual Israel that God has not changed and that He still requires His people to be obedient to Him and have a zeal for the things pertaining to the kingdom of God, and for good works. God still requires His tree to bear much fruit and “by their fruits” God knows those that are His. Jesus reminded His own disciples, “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit,” and again He said, “Herein is My Father glorified that ye bear much fruit; so

shall ye be my disciples." How shall we glorify God? How shall we truly be Christ's disciples? — by bearing much fruit. In Rev. 3 we have a clear if brief indication of how God regards even a lukewarm church when He says to the congregation at Laodicea, "I know thy works that thou art neither cold nor hot. So then because thou are neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth." Like physical Israel, the spiritual Israel is a chosen people, "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: Which in time past were not a people but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy" (1 Peter 2:9).

We Gentiles (who in time past were not a people but now are, and who in time past were without mercy but have now obtained mercy, and who are now a chosen generation and a holy nation) should remember the grand and glorious purpose God has for us, stated here by Peter, that "we should *show forth the praises* of Him who hath called us out of darkness into His marvellous light." May we strive ever to be fruitful in every good work so that God might never associate us with the barren fig tree. The same apostle (Peter) in his second epistle provides us with the divine recipe for fruitfulness when he says, "... add to your faith, virtue: and to virtue, knowledge: and to knowledge, temperance: and to temperance, patience: and to patience, Godliness: and to Godliness, brotherly kindness: and to brotherly kindness, love: For if these things be in you and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful . . ." (2 Peter 1:8).

Editor.

HELL

The Valley of Hinnom.

There is a valley on the southern end of Jerusalem which is called the valley of Hinnom, or Topheth. It has a long and ignoble history. From the time of Solomon, who introduced the worship of Molech to Jerusalem, (1 Kings 11:7), to the days of Jesus when it was used as a rubbish dump. Molech, who was the god of Ammon, was worshipped by incinerating one's offspring as a sacrifice to his honour. This abomination had been warned against in the Law, (Lev. 20:1-5), but because of Solomon's apostasy the practice gained a footing among the Israelites. We are told that King Ahab worshipped Molech (2 Chron. 28:3), and Manassah also made sacrifice in the fire to the idol, in the valley of Topheth (Topheth means 'fireplace').

(2 Chron. 33:6). In this day and age we are appalled by the thought of aborted children left to die, while kicking for life on some cold hospital slab. How much more horrific is the image of infants being cremated in their senses. The tortured cries of these little ones, the crackling flesh, the smothering silence. How horrifying! How repulsive! Fortunately even in those sinful and barbaric times good men appeared to re-establish righteousness and sanity. When Josiah came to power he inaugurated sweeping reforms, to prevent further human holocaust (2 Kings 23:10). It seems like Hinnom became a burial place for a while (Jer. 7:32) and later on the city's rubbish dump. While serving as the city's dump, fires were constantly burning and it was not unusual for carcasses to be discarded there, according to Smith's Bible Dictionary.

This valley is used in the teaching of Jesus to represent the place where the wicked will spend all eternity. So when He spoke to the people about hell, all the defiled, grotesque associations with the valley of Hinnom immediately presented itself to their minds; because they were historically imprisoned in the word.

The deep torment and pain of hell fire

We also must understand its background to be fully cognizant of all the implications in the word 'HELL.' When we do, passages like Mk. 9: 47-48 will no longer be viewed in small T.V. dimensions, but enlarged by its historical background will present itself life size to the readers' mind. "And if your eye causes you to stumble, cast it out, it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes, to be cast into hell, WHERE THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED." A foreboding picture of death and decay complicated by the unquenchable torment of fire. Many, many passages high-light the punishment of fire. In Jude verse 7, Sodem and Gomorrah are exhibited as an example, un undergoing the punishment of eternal fire. Rev. :8 says, "But for the cowardly and unbelieving, and abominable, and murderers, and immoral persons, and sorcerers, and idolators, and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." "If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he will be thrown into the lake of fire," Rev. 20:15. "And the smoke of their torment goes up for ever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, those who worship the beast and his image . . ." Rev. 14:11. "The chaff will be burned with unquenchable fire," Mt. 3:12. Having had the unforgettable experience of seeing two men in the 'Burn Unit' of a hospital, one partially burned and the other almost totally flayed by an explosion, these warnings become frightening in the extreme. Some people do not believe we can burn and not be consumed, but is not the burning-bush proof to the contrary? Others who are not willing to face the plainest statements, suggest the word 'destroy' in Mt. 10:28 means annihilate. Yet in Lk. 5:37 where the record talks about putting new wine into old wineskins, it tells us that the new wine would burst the old wineskins, "And the skins will be ruined." The Greek word for 'ruined' is the same word as is used in Mt. 10:28 for 'destroy.'

No one would suggest that the skins were annihilated! In Lk. 15:6 the shepherd rejoices and calls his friends to "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost," the word 'lost' is the same Greek word as 'destroy' in Mt. 10:28. Could anyone believe the lost sheep was annihilated? We see then that the word "destroy" does not suggest non-existence but total ruination. The plain facts are that the deep torment and excruciating pain of hell fire goes on for all eternity.

The isolation and fear of black darkness

The parables that warn us about being ready for eternity also stress the terrible loss of those who are not prepared. For example, many of the sons of the kingdom "Shall be cast out into outer darkness; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Mt. 8:12). The individual who did not put on the wedding garment (said the Lord Jesus) was to be bound hand and foot "And cast into outer darkness; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth," (Mt. 22:13). The verdict pronounced on the opportunist servant was, "Cut him in pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites; weeping shall be there and the gnashing of teeth," (Mt. 24:51). The 'one talent man' found himself in the same predicament (Mt. 25:30). Can we recall our own experiences of darkness. Perhaps we can identify with an experience Abraham had (recorded for us in Gen. 15:12), "Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, terror and great darkness fell upon him" other translations say, "Horror of great darkness." If our mental picture is not identical with that of Abram, it should not impair our ability to comprehend, to some extent, what it must have been like. But do we not instinctively recoil from such an experience? We all do, because darkness suggests isolation and fear. Had it ever struck us that in the darkness of hell all the wonder of

the colour, which so delights us, will be gone. Our eyes would become opaque from lack of light, locked in a stare of despair. Reflecting only the awful suffering of the wicked and the unbelievable ruin of our own lives. All because we loved the darkness rather than the light (Jn. 3:19). "O that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night" for the lost of the sons of men!!!

Hell is the very antithesis of God

It is easy to see how darkness can be associated with hell. "God is light" (I Jn. 1:5). "And in Him there is no darkness at all." To be severed from God is to be cut off from light. To be cut off from light is to be in darkness. "God is love" (I Jn. 4:8), apart from Him there is no love. Can we see to where this is all leading? As God is "All in all" He is the sum total of love, mercy, kindness, goodness, justice, truth, light etc. To exist apart from Him is to exist without love, mercy, kindness and so on. Just think **NO MERCY, NO LOVE!** We have all heard people say, "this life is hell." Even when our suffering is mercifully curbed; when evil is countered by so much good; when love shields us from the ravages of hate. Hell is where there is **NO mercy, NO good, absolute evil.** To be there is imprisonment with murderers, sorcerers, pimps, homosexuals, thieves, liars, 'junkies' and the rest. No wonder there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. All because in our selfish and self-centred lives we forgot God, cut Him off from our thinking and our living. Yet hell is just the fruit of that sort of lifestyle. To live and die without God will be to continue in that state for all eternity. To exist apart from God could be nothing else but hell.

The horrors of hell

The valley of Hinnom can only *represent* the nightmare of hell. It could not capture the excruciating pain of eternal fire nor the frightening loss of black darkness. This is the reality of eternal separation from God. God who is life and light, and every good thing. If we want to be saved from hell we should read, Heb.II:6, Acts17:30-31; Rom.10:9-10; Acts2:38.

Steve Kearney,
Dublin.

GLEANINGS

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

MIGHTY DAYS

"As thy days, so shall thy strength be." Deut 33:25

"With God's mighty grace we can unlock ourselves. If life were just a sunny picnic that was never broken up by fierce tempest, by thunder and lightning and pelting rain, the greater part of our human resources would remain unused and concealed. It is in the mighty days that we discover ourselves. Latent gifts troop out of their graves. Buried seeds spring into vigorous life. We never thought we had it in us? The big struggle becomes not only our revealer, but also our unearther, and we put on strength and majesty like a robe.

We are living through mighty days, and by God's good grace we can be equal to the days. These are days of great unlockings, and we are having surprises on every side! Young fellows who were regarded as milksops are revealing themselves as iron pillars. Once-while selfish men are unveiling their spiritual wealth in glorious sacrifice. Women who appeared to be living for nothing are giving their life like wine! The "mighty days" are upon us, and God is making us equal to the days."

J. H. Jowett.

"Oh, magnify the Lord with me!"

"How can we magnify God who is so great? We cannot make Him greater. No; but when we use a pair of binoculars or a telescope to look, say, at the moon, we do not

expect to make the moon any bigger than it is, but to bring it nearer. And when we magnify God, we do not make Him greater, but we bring Him nearer to thousands from whom He seems very far off.”

Hudson Taylor

“Oh! taste and see that God is good.” “Blessed is the man that trusteth in Him.”

“What is it that He desires from us? Nothing but our thankful recognition and reception of His benefits. We honour God by taking the full cup of salvation which he commends to our lips, and by calling, while we drink upon the name of the Lord. Our true response to His Word, which is essentially a proffer of blessing to us, is to open our hearts to receive, and, receiving, to render grateful acknowledgement. The echo of love which gives and forgives, is love which accepts and thanks. We have but to lift up our empty and impure hands, opened wide to receive the gift which He lays in them — and though they be empty and impure, yet ‘the lifting up of our hands’ is ‘as the evening sacrifice;’ our sense of need stands in the place of all offerings. The stained thankfulness of our poor hearts is accepted by Him who inhabits the praises of eternity, and yet delights in the praises of Israel. He bends from heaven to give, and all He asks is that we should take. He only seeks our thankfulness — but He does seek it. And wherever His grace is discerned, and His love is welcomed, there praise breaks forth, as surely as streams pour from the cave of the glacier when the sun of summer melts it, or earth answers the touch of spring with flowers.”

Alexander Maclaren.

WE QUOTE — WILLIAM JAMES

“The Lord may forgive us our sins, but the nervous system never does.”

“Action seems to follow feeling, but really action and feeling go together; and by regulating the action, which is under the more direct control of the will, we can indirectly regulate the feeling, which is not.”

“Thus, the sovereign voluntary path to cheerfulness, if your cheerfulness be lost, is to sit up cheerfully and to act and speak as if cheerfulness were already there.”

“Much of what we call Evil . . . can often be converted into a bracing and tonic good by a simple change of the sufferer’s inner attitude from one of fear to one of fight.”

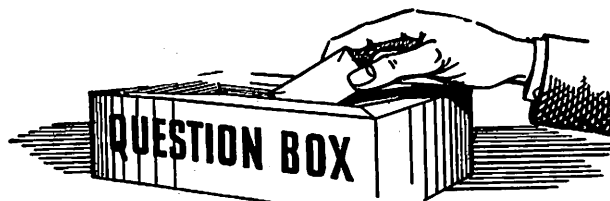
“Compared to what we ought to be, we are only half awake. We are making use of only a small part of our physical and mental resources. Stating the thing broadly, the human individual thus lives far within his limits. He possesses powers of various sorts which he habitually fails to use.”

“Our infirmities help us unexpectedly.”

“Of course, the sovereign cure for worry is religious faith.”

“A new zest for life . . . more life, a larger, richer, more satisfying life.”

Selected by Leonard Morgan.



Conducted by
Alf Marsden

“Quite recently I have heard one or two well known public figures say that they are ‘borne-again’ Christians. Could you please explain what they mean?”

This is a phrase in the modern idiom which has been imported into this country from abroad. I rather suspect that its use is associated with the so-called charismatic groups. Implicit in the statement is the fact that if one can be described as a 'born-again' Christian then there may be others who could be described as 'non-born-again' Christians; whatever the description, it would seem to indicate that they were, in both cases, Christians. This idea I would object to, and I intend to show why.

'Ye must be born again'

It is perfectly true that Jesus taught that a person should be born again. John chapter 3 records a conversation between Jesus and one Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. Nicodemus made a very perceptive statement concerning the relationship between God and Jesus, "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God". To this Jesus replied, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (v3). Nicodemus seemed to think that Jesus meant a *physical* rebirth, but Jesus disabused his mind of this by insisting, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (v5). So the teaching of Jesus is perfectly plain and unambiguous; it is necessary for a person to be born of water and of the Spirit before entry can be gained into the kingdom of God.

Why is re-birth necessary?

We can argue logically that re-birth would become necessary if a person had suffered either physical or spiritual death. The Bible teaches us regarding physical death that it is appointed unto man once to die and after that the judgement, so as regards physical death we are thinking not of *re-birth* but of *resurrection* at some future time. This, then, leaves us with spiritual death, and it is this type of death which Jesus had in mind when He spoke to Nicodemus, and which is reiterated time and again in the subsequent N.T. writings.

Re-birth is necessary because of SIN. This is a very unfashionable word these days. People are very fond of talking about 'moral degredation', or 'environmental maladjustment', or even trying to explain away anti-social behaviour by saying that a person is suffering from 'social deprivation'. No matter how we may try to adorn the phraseology, the basic problem is SIN. Sin causes spiritual death, and it affects all, "There is none righteous, no, not one"; and, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:10,23). Writing to the Ephesians Paul says, "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins" (eph.2:1). Commenting on the transition which takes place, John says, "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren" (1 John 3:14).

We are saying, then, that a person can be physically alive but spiritually dead, that is, he has no communication with the Eternal Spirit. It was Professor Drummond who argued that a tree has a form of life but it cannot communicate with man, nor man with it; in other words, even though alive, it is *dead to man*. I think the sinner must view himself as being without hope and without God in the world; he is alive, but he is spiritually dead so far as communion with God is concerned; he is held in the thralldom of Satan.

How are we born again?

It is Peter who points us the way. After commenting that our faith and hope should be in God, he goes on, "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently; being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever" (1 Pet.1:21-23). So the process is quite clear; the soul must be purified by obedience to the truth; that truth comes through the incorruptible Word of God and results in us being born

again. It is the *living* Word, and it abides for ever. Peter then says, "And this is the Word which by the gospel is preached unto you" (v25).

Shortly before Jesus left the earth, Matthew records Him as saying, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given unto me; Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (matt.28:18-20, N.I.V.). They were to preach the gospel of salvation in Christ Jesus; that He had been crucified, buried, and raised from the dead. This gospel was to be first preached in Jerusalem, and in that city on the Day of Pentecost when Peter first preached it, three thousand souls obeyed and were baptised. These were three thousand *disciples*; many more were to follow in obedience to the Gospel. They were given life by obedience to the Living Word. As James put it, "Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures" (James 1:18 R.S.V.). These first disciples, and every disciple since, has been granted a new life in Christ Jesus through obedience to the Gospel, and Acts of Apostles records, "The disciples were first called *Christians* at Antioch" (Acts 11:26).

Therefore, we do not need any such designation as 'born-again' Christian; a Christian is *only* a Christian *because* he has been born again. When I became a Christian, I, along with many other Christians, became a member of the Lord's Body, the Church; I became a willing subject in the Kingdom of God's dear Son, and because I received the gracious in-dwelling of the Holy Spirit when I was immersed into Christ I also became a partaker of the Divine nature. Such is the status of a Christian.

A further thought

Some people try to explain the spiritual re-birth by a direct analogy with the physical birth, and this is not really possible. Physical birth is the bringing into being of a completely new individual which before conception had no existence whatsoever. The spiritual regenerative process is not like that; it is rather a renewing of a personality which *already exists* but which sin has marred to such a degree that communion with God is not possible. To the Ephesians Paul wrote, "Ye hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph.2:1). "Even when *we* were dead in sins, hath quickened *us* together with Christ, And hath raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus (vv 5,6). A new bias is given to our thinking, actions, behaviour, and orientation, in fact *we* become new persons in Christ Jesus. I do not know of any spiritual foetal period similar to the physical foetal period.

Furthermore, I believe it is a mistake to think of the Christian as having two separate and distinct personalities; the personality inherent in the flesh, and the new personality as given by the Spirit. Such dualism leads us to the dangerous thoughts that the personality of the flesh will always and inevitably go on sinning, while the personality of the Spirit can and should co-exist with it. Such a view, to my mind, does despite to the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives, and gives us licence to go on sinning. Responsibility attaches to the individual Christian, and God will hold him accountable for those things done in life. While it is true that sin *can*, and *does*, invade the life of the Christian, the accountability will be such that we will be expected to resist and subdue the sin, and yield to and be regulated by the Spirit. John seems to indicate that the subjugation of sin is desirable, for he says, "My little children, these things write I unto you, *that ye sin not*. And *if* any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1). And who

would be bold enough to say that Paul is indicating a split personality in Romans chapter 7? No, I believe that Paul was speaking about his pre-conversion experience.

So, then, I conclude that when people say that they are 'born-again' Christians they are indicating that they are looking for charismatic experiences such as speaking in tongues, and are somehow dissatisfied and unfulfilled by just being a Christian.

(All questions, please, to Alf Marsden, 377 Billings Road, Highfield, Wigan).

THOUGHTS OF PEACE

"For I know the thoughts that I think towards you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace." Jeremiah 29:11.

"In this dark world here below,
There is trouble, there is woe,
But I have thoughts of peace in my heart;
They all come from Christ my Lord,
Through His very precious word,
These thoughts of peace in my heart."

To a people held in captivity, far from home, oppressed and distressed, the message of God, through Jeremiah, must have come as dew from heaven upon a dry ground. God had not forgotten neither forsaken His people. In spite of the sin which had caused the present calamity, God remembered the promises He had made to their fathers, and His thoughts were thoughts of peace. He desired that they should return to Him and to their own land.

How far are we from God? Are we oppressed and distressed because of sin? Are we in the midst of trouble and woe? God's thoughts toward us are thoughts of peace. We may have thoughts of peace in our hearts also. Let us turn to the Word of God and read and store up its teaching in our minds that we may find peace with God and that perfect life which is found in Him through Jesus.

"Satan's host may all assail,
Yet I know that they will fail,
From thoughts of peace I have in my heart;
Jesus quickly comes to aid,
I've no need to be afraid
With thoughts of peace in my heart."

The Christian cannot expect a life that is free from the attack of Satan, but must be prepared for the onslaught of sin. When we fill our minds with the thoughts of God, we shall have little room for worldly things. This does not mean that everyday affairs will be shut out, but they will be put into true perspective, our Father's will having pre-eminence.

Our strength cometh from the Lord, who made heaven and earth. It comes to us through His Word, the Bible, and like the Psalmist we may lay it up in our hearts that we might not sin against God. Jesus is our helper, and the moment we call upon Him He is there, ready to help in every hour of need. He is not limited to time or space and thus is able to be present with all who put their trust in Him. Our troubles though like mountains can be turned into molehills by our thoughts of peace. Jesus said, "In the world you will have tribulation, but be not afraid, I have overcome the world." In Him we can be "more than conquerors."

“I will ne'er unhappy be
 Just as long as there's for me
 These wondrous thoughts of peace in my heart;
 I will wear a happy smile
 Just to show that life's worth while
 With thoughts of peace in my heart.”

Show me the person with thoughts of peace in the heart and there you will find the happy child of God. Our feelings and thoughts are revealed in our expressions. When they are dismal we are morose and sad; when they are happy, we are cheerful and joyous. Wouldn't it be grand if we could be free from the worries and cares of this world, for then we should be always happy. We realise that skies are not always blue, that clouds must appear, but we ought not to dread them. The hymnwriter puts it like this, “The clouds you so much dread, are big with mercy, and shall break in blessings on your head.”

Obstacles are meant to be surmounted, difficulties overcome. Without sorrow we would never appreciate joy; without sickness health; need we say more? God's thoughts of peace are for our good, and successful Christian living is dependant upon our determination to extract from the Word of God those thoughts, which, when applied daily in our lives, will give us the victory over sin and self.

Let Faith in the Lord Jesus and adherence to His Word, be the mainspring of our lives, for then we shall never be run-down, but ready always to give to every one who asks, a reason for the hope which is within us, “I have thoughts of peace in my heart.

“Thoughts of peace, Thoughts of peace
 In my Heart,
 And from Jesus I'll never depart;
 For in Him I have found
 Perfect life to abound,
 From thoughts of peace in my heart.”

Tom Kemp

HE GAVE: THE RESULT OF GOD'S LOVE

GIFTS are tokens of love. Young men commonly give presents to show affection for young ladies. Sometimes husbands and wives remember special occasions with gifts. An appropriate present may take the place of word, as is indicated by the familiar slogan in the floral business, “Say it with flowers.”

God shows in his word the blessings that result from giving. He freely gave for our spiritual and temporal welfare. God gave when he created the heaven, the earth, the sun, moon and stars, and other great things of nature. He gave to Adam and Eve the abundant blessings that resulted from their being placed in the beautiful garden of Eden. He gave when he richly blessed numerous others, including Noah, Abraham, Joseph and Moses. Finally, he reached the climax in giving when he lovingly offered his greatest gift, his precious Son.

We notice the additional evidence of the value of giving, that Jesus (in commanding the twelve whom he sent forth) said, “Freely ye have received, freely give” (Matthew 10:8). From Miletus the Apostle Paul called the Ephesian elders of the

church to him, his important words to them included the admonition concerning their supporting the weak, and their remembering the words that Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).

God's giving is sacrificial "God is love" (1 John 4:8) and he sacrificed to demonstrate his love for us. Sacrificial love is truly outstanding; God "gave his only begotten Son" (John 3:16), and our Lord Jesus Christ gave himself. Jesus left glory, in the presence of the Father, to descend to the earth as a result of the love shown to frail humanity. He said, "Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was" (John 17:5).

God's love is sincere. Sincere love is the only kind that the Divine gives. Divine wisdom, with the realisation of human weakness, admonishes (in the Apostle Paul's language), "Let love be without dissimulation" (Romans 12:9). We have the privilege to exercise sincere love as a result of the divine example. God sincerely loved; hence, He gave his dear Son. God's Word teaches that the origin of love is not to be in mere words, but it is to emanate from the heart. The Apostle John (through inspiration) wrote that love should be "in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:18). We realise that it is relatively easy for the normal person to convey his love in words; hence, this awareness should be beneficial in aiding us to be more appreciative of the sincerity of divine love for us.

God's giving is significant. There is genuine meaning in his love, and we need sufficient understanding concerning great results of it. There is true significance in being afforded the opportunity to serve in his church, in being blessed by commemorating his death for our sins, in exercising gratefulness for his resurrection and his eventual ascension to the Father's right hand, in living in the Christian's hope of temporal life, and ultimately dying in happy anticipation of receiving eternal life. Without God's giving his precious Son to die for our sins, we would be without the foregoing blessings. God's loving and giving has resulted in rich and bountiful blessings for those who obey his will.

God's giving is supreme. It is literally second to none. It is the greatest; his best gift was his Son. No gift could compare favourably with him. He is in a category by himself; he was given to save us from sin.

God's giving his son was sacrificial, sincere, significant, and supreme. The result and importance of his love, in the bestowal of his best gift, far surpasses any other gift he could have offered. Our Lord Jesus Christ is indispensable!

—Selected.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

JANUARY 1982

- 3 Exodus 14,13-31 I Cor.10,1-13
- 10 Exodus 32,1-20 I Cor.10,14-33
- 17 Genesis 2,7-25 I Cor.11,1-16
- 24 Exodus 12,1-17 I Cor.11,17-34
- 31 Numbers 11,16-30 I Cor.12

WARNINGS FROM THE PAST

"Will we ever learn"? Certainly not if

we remain ignorant of the past! Some lessons may be difficult to appreciate because their import can be misunderstood or even misleading, but these that Paul reminds us of cannot be mistaken. His first emphasis is on ALL. Every person passing through the sea could not forget what happened. Each man, woman and child had the astonishing experience. Have we ever, or can we ever fully appreciate what God did to release His people from Egyptian bondage? How could that mixed multitude with all

its household necessities march out of Egypt in one day? The Egyptian nation was paralysed with grief. They THRUST out their Israelite neighbours in panic fear of their God. The Israelites took with them their cattle too. Can we picture a million souls of all ages footing it out into the wilderness? They first walked "five in a rank" — "harnessed" towards what must have been an inlet of the Red Sea. This may have been several days' march and they encamped with Egypt behind them and the open expanse of water before them so that Pharaoh thought them trapped — and they felt themselves trapped also, and cried to God. A mighty east wind drove the sea off the land and thus opened up a way for the people to pass over. There was mist and darkness for the Egyptian army and light and help for Israel while the people in their defenceless condition passed safely over. We can only feebly realise this scene of the waters returning in their strength — an irresistible flood like the spring tide or the Severn bore, overwhelming the host and its chariots within sight of the helpless mixed multitude escaped with their goods and chattels from a condition of slavery.

This was but a beginning of the wonders which unfolded before them in the wilderness where they were fed, nourished and trained in spiritual things until capable of organised warfare to take possession of the promised land. All the people with all the experience had short memories, and failed to heed divine help and instruction. The Corinthian Christians had come out of heathenism. They were suffering for it. Some had already fallen back from good behaviour. They were subject to temptation to return to "Egypt" . . . They must give heed to Paul's teaching, and do it humbly and with a consciousness of weakness — which only trust and obedience could fulfill. By our new birth we are in the same situation and our deepest need is humility with implicit trust in God. Hence "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he

fall". Alas, it is so easy to think the way Thine "When walking in mine own". We have more privileges and better promises, and our temptations vary widely from those of the Israelites but the basic principles for faithfulness remain. Jesus, Paul and surely Peter echo the warning.

COMMUNION

Sharing the sacred emblems puts upon us an obligation not to share in many other things, and our love for our fellows also gives us obligation to share some things, especially when there is hardship. We have to exercise discrimination. Paul illustrates this in a practical example and in his own use of liberty from worldly superstitions. Sometimes we must stand out and be counted; at other times silence is better. May the Lord enable us to know each time by prayerful "watch".

HEAD COVERING

This matter is discussed carefully in a study obtainable from our brother J. C. Partington, 36 Stavange Close, Corby, NN18 9HT. There are doubtless others. Obedience to the principle and practice is being discouraged widely by many who should know better. The "when" may be rightly discussed. However the instruction cannot be unless we deny inspiration.

THE TABLE OF THE LORD

This is the central ordinance of the Christ-oriented religious bodies of today, and has always been so. Perhaps we should except the Quakers and the Salvation Army. I now quote — "It means a wide variety of things to those who partake of it, but it always opens every heart in loving receptivity to Christ . . ." (Frank C. Laubach). In instituting the breaking of the loaf, and the drinking out of the cup, our Saviour undoubtedly intended every one of His committed followers to understand that we share His body and His blood. The common participation in the salvation made possible by His incarnation, death

and resurrection. What closer bond could there be for us and for one another? It so fittingly recalls His parable, which caused such astonishment and shock to some but brings us to realise better His closeness to us (John 6,51-56) by a fleshly AND spiritual relationship. The Almighty Creator provides for our existence physically but He also in the person of His Son provides for spiritual life through the life and words of Jesus — which “are spirit and are life” (6,63). As food and drink are absorbed to maintain bodily existence and function, so the life, action and words of Jesus nourish the soul. How necessary it is to be constantly and habitually reminded of Him. The weekly observance is a great need but how much more important is it that it is a constant mental and spiritual exercise? The observance can become an empty “ritual”, but let a man examine himself and so observe (11,28).

SPIRITUAL GIFTS

It seems important to recognise the purpose of the gifts, and to separate them from the fact that through faith, repentance and baptism there is a new life in which the spirit of the Saviour is communicated to every true believer. There is a new creature born of water and the spirit. It is clear from the last two verses of our chapter 12 that there was discrimination by the Holy Spirit as to who should receive the various gifts just as Jesus made appointment of apostles. All were designed for the upbuilding of the church in which there were AND ARE many different “ministrations” (v.5). The control of the church is by the Word of God now written. Then it was by direct divine rule through persons inspired by the Holy Spirit under apostolic guidance. We only have to recognise the need for supernatural aid over all the world and in every church to spread the apostolic authority and message without the written record, to see the divine wisdom in providing it.

THE CHURCH A BODY

The diversity of the human body is amazing — “we are fearfully and wonderfully made”. In a healthy body the manifold parts function harmoniously together. It is therefore a fitting symbol of the body of people brought together by God through the gospel. Not one of them is exactly like another yet it is His design that they should be united in His service. As it is the spirit of a man which controls the body, so the spirit of Christ should control His body the church. This is easily said, and we need to take to heart the apostle’s teaching — principle and practice. The spiritual gifts obviously had a special place in that early time of the church’s existence, but our normal functioning under instruction of the Word, which is spirit and life, has the same need exactly for working together to edification (Eph.4,1-16). This month’s readings as so often can well occupy very special attention from every Christian, and our notes have but glanced at them.

R. B. Scott

HOW DOES THE CHURCH CHANGE?

The Lord’s church consists of two basic elements . . . **people and truth**. In the absence of people the church can have only a potential existence. God’s plan, the proposed characteristics, are inherent in the seed, the word of God; but these truths await applications in the lives of the people. They were given originally with people in mind . . . humble, submissive, obedient people . . . God’s people.

Now God’s people are such by their own choice . . . i.e., although God desires their allegiance, and has done everything necessary to make their salvation possible, each individual must will to come to God. Further, no one is forced to remain faithful. The people of God choose to continue in His paths. They may, and some do deny the Lord that bought them (2 Ptr. 2:1) and depart from the faith (1 Tim. 4:1).

God the Father, and our Lord and King Jesus Christ change not . . . so the Divine element of the church is fixed and constant. But the human element of the church is not so stable. The people may be "off again, on again, gone again". Here is reason, if indeed reason is needed, for Paul's warning that we must not measure the church by the rule of human action (2 Cor. 10:12).

The above principles are true . . . almost to the point of being axiomatic in the thinking of Bible scholars. Yet, it is the ignoring of these very principles that makes sectarianism . . . and its fruit, partyism . . . so common. We come to know the people who are, let us assume, walking in truth. We identify the church . . . equate the church . . . with these people, their place of assembly, their practices. Somehow the fact that they are the Lord's church only if they walk according to His truth gets pushed into the background.

The people change. The changes are made over a long period of time, perhaps beginning with concepts and practices wrong in principle but not easily discernible. The power of tradition asserts itself, and we justify (?) further wrongs on the basis of things done in the past. Since these people are regarded as the church, we soon regard their practices as those of the church of Christ; and all who differ are heretics. It is this party spirit that causes many to think that those who differ have "left the Lord" or "left the church."

The remedy is obvious . . . to all who look for it. We must constantly check our principles and practices against the unchanging standard, the word of God. Of course such checking demands objective, prejudice-free study. We must compare our practices with those things authorized in God's truth. And this remedy (the medicine) may be bitter . . . in fact, it will be bitter to those steeped in the party spirit. We question their sacred cows and dampen their pride.

Here we discover who love the Lord's church, and who love a human party that has been called the Lord's church; who are converted to the human element, and who are converted to the Divine element of the church. The answer is embarrassing at times.

Robert F. Turner,
1608 Sherrard,
Burnet, Texas, U.S.A.

WELL SAID

How easily one may justify self, when he stands with the majority.

How easily one may feel he could not prevent what happened, when he was too cowardly to try.

How easily the spiritually weak and spineless could stand hidden in the masses and cry with a loud voice, "Crucify him, crucify him!"

A doctrine is not false just because you never heard it before, or because it is contrary to what you have always understood, or because you are not willing to accept it.

Neither is it right because you can't disprove it, nor because a big-name preacher advocates it, nor because it is what the majority believe.

Some people who boast about being broadminded are really just too indifferent and ignorant to know just which side they should be on . . . that's nothing to boast about!

WHAT MUST I DO TO BE SAVED?

THE answer to this vital question depends on just where you stand before God.

1. If you are an alien sinner, then you must believe on the Lord Jesus Christ with all your heart, repent of your sins,

and be immersed in the name of Jesus for the remission of your sins (Acts 2:38; 16:30-34; 17:30).

2. If you are an erring child of God, then you must confess your sins, in sincere penitence ask God's forgiveness, and return to your duty (Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:9).

3. If you are a faithful Christian, you must, with God's help, continue to live in the service of the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:58; Hebrews 3:14; Revelation 2:10).

THE WORLD AND CHRIST

THE world's appeal is to self-gratification.

Christ's challenge is to self-renunciation.

The world's call is — Indulge yourself!

Christ's summons is — Sacrifice yourself.

The world says: "Get all you can."

Christ says: "Give all you can."

The world appeals to the worst in you.

Christ appeals to the best in you.

When the outlook is bad, try the uplook.

OBITUARY

BRO. WALTER SMITH AN APPRECIATION

BRO. Walter died on Saturday, 12th September, 1981, and his passing marked the end of a remarkable Christian life. He was immersed at the age of 12 and he was 82 years old when he died, a total of 70 years as a Christian. It is a very sobering thought for me to realise that when I was immersed into Christ at the age of 28, Walter had already been in the Church for some 40 years.

During his Christian life he served the Church here at Albert St., Wigan, in the capacity of Bible School

Superintendent, Deacon, Preacher, and Teacher; for many years he was also the Secretary. He was remarkably consistent and it was most unusual for he and his dear wife Martha to be missing from the Meetings. He had an acute realisation of the core of the Christian message because many of his lessons were based on the love of God as expressed in Christ Jesus.

As younger men in the Church we were greatly influenced by him; he epitomised true faithfulness, and his guidance will be sorely missed. For many years he suffered indifferent health, but this hardly ever, if at all, prevented him from meeting with the saints. He and Martha were always hospitable, and many visiting speakers will remember their fellowship in the home with gratitude.

We pray a blessing on all of his family in their great loss, and we also, even though mourning the loss, rejoice because we are assured that he is now with his Lord.

ALF MARSDEN
(Elder).

Tranent:— It is with deep sorrow that we report the passing from this life of our sister Agnes Colgan at the age of 65 years. We had all hoped that she had made a good recovery from a heart attack, but she passed away only eight days after being discharged from hospital.

She responded to the call of the gospel in her early thirties, and continued to the end as faithful servant of the Lord.

We give thanks for her example of quiet devotion, and her faith in Him who said: "I go to prepare a place for you."

We commend her husband and family to the comfort and consolation of our Heavenly Father.

"His own He shelter giveth,"

Our times are in His hand."

The funeral services in the meeting place and at the graveside were conducted by Bro David Scott.

Tom Nisbet.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

Please note the new subscription rates printed in this issue will apply to orders for 1982. This increase will partly offset our increased printing and postal costs.

Per year—post paid by surface mail: United Kingdom and Commonwealth £5.00, Canada and U.S.A. \$10.00. Air mail please add £1.50 or \$3.00 to surface mail rates.

Reading cards will be available later in the year at 5p each.

It is intended to bind the last three years issues of the Scripture Standard into a single volume. These will be available in 1982 and as only a small number will be available orders should be placed as soon as possible.

What chance can a man have to control his destiny when he cannot control himself?

SHAKESPEARE

wrote, "How far that little candle throws its beam, so shines a good deed in a naughty world . . ."

UNITED IN THEIR BELIEF

The article in last month's issue of the 'S.S.' entitled as above has caused some confusion and not a little dismay. I have had enquiries and in a written reply have explained that I did not write the article. It was a clipping I took from the 'Edinburgh Evening News' which I clearly marked as such to the printer. Unfortunately it was printed without the explanation that it was from a newspaper. I included it in the 'S.S.' as of general interest as to how the world's press saw the 'marriage' of the U.R.C. and some congregations of the Co-operation churches of Christ. I certainly did not subscribe to the article's terminology or conclusions and presumably had the article been described as a press clipping by our printer the regrettable misunderstanding would not have occurred. Notwithstanding this incident it is worth mentioning that the editor does not necessarily agree with, or subscribe to, everything appearing in the 'S.S.'

Editor

THERE is no good reason for men to lie about each other. Most of the time the plain truth would be bad enough!

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