

The **SCRIPTURE STANDARD**

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

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GOD'S SOVEREIGN WILL

Very few of us, a week ago, when the tragic death of Diana, Princess of Wales, was announced, could possibly have imagined the scenes which have followed since, or the sheer extent of the outpouring of public grief, and sorrow. It has been completely unprecedented. Indeed there are still those who can't, or won't believe it, and feel that there must have been some mistake, or it's a bad dream. No death in this country has ever had the impact that this one has: not even the death of Sir Winston Churchill, and even if it had been the Queen, herself, who had died, I doubt if the country would have been so moved. For a solid week now, our T.V. channels have talked of nothing else, and tomorrow the funeral will be the largest in living memory and attended by millions. All week the citizenry have taken to the streets, placing floral tributes on all kinds of public buildings, and standing in long queues to sign Books of Remembrance, with an average waiting time of six hours but some have been standing in the rain for eleven hours, to sign their names. Thousands more have been joining these queues by the hour, and the Books of Remembrance will be available for some weeks after the funeral. Very few of us have not been moved by the occasion and our sympathies go out to all Diana's friends and family; and especially do our hearts and sympathies go out to her two boys, William and Harry, losing a mother so early in life.

Those who initially couldn't believe the news, are now coming to terms with it but are, like everyone else, still asking, "How could it happen?" Some are now asking "How was it allowed to happen?" and, as always, the public are seeking someone to blame. Quite often in these tragedies, people, in seeking to place blame, end up by blaming God and asking "Where was God, when He was needed?", but so far, in this case, this accusation has only been voiced once or twice. Indeed there seems to be no doubt as to how the Princess died. She was, with others, in a car which was being pursued by photographers and was travelling at great speed; driven by someone seriously "over the limit" in the consumption of alcohol, which eventually crashed in a Paris underpass. Such accidents occur on a daily basis: especially with cars going too fast and driven by men "over the limit". Death, as we know, is no respecter of persons, and for Princess Diana to be in a vehicle in such circumstances, she was always in great danger, and in the event, sadly succumbed in the inevitable accident.

GOD'S WILL

Although there's no question of Diana's death having had anything to do with "God's Will", or vice versa, there is, nevertheless, something about such tragedies which makes us think, perhaps, of "God's Will". Similarly, when babies and toddlers

die, one wonders why they were brought into the world for a few days, just to be so swiftly taken away again. Job said, "**The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away, blessed be the name of the Lord**" but surely men often *take themselves away* (by suicide) or take one another away, as in the slaughter of the First World War, and other similar cases of mutual assassination. The same thoughts come to us when there are major disasters, such as explosions down a coal-mine, or fishing vessels lost at sea. The miners' wives stand quietly huddled together in prayer at the pithead, but as the body-bags come to the surface the mood becomes angry, and God often gets the blame. I remember one mining disaster where an underground explosion was caused by one miner who, managing to secrete upon his person a match and tobacco, later scratched the match in a dangerous section of the mine: God having nothing whatsoever to do with it. Similarly, when all those lovely young toddlers were shot at Dunblane, a year ago, a whole hour was spent on T.V. discussing "Where was God at Dunblane.?"

To some, *everything* is God's Will. If they apply for a job and get it; it was "God's will" that they got it. If they didn't get the job; then, that too was "God's will". Surely there must be something wrong with that logic. Perhaps, if the truth were known, the applicant had a bad interview, or perhaps was not truly qualified for the job, or perhaps someone else was much better qualified. Again, if someone terminally ill is prayed for but dies, then the death must have been God's will. However, if the patient revives, that too must have been God's will, whereas we know that medical attention and expensive drugs can keep a patient alive if given and where these are not available (e.g. parts of India, Africa etc.) many thousands die needlessly. It's difficult to believe that it is God's will that people die needlessly, or that a toddler run over by a bus, can ever be God's will. Perhaps we should think long and hard before we decide that whatever happens is God's will, for surely most of what goes on in this troubled world must be light-years away from what God would want, or will.

GOD'S WILL IN THE SCRIPTURES

Although the earth is but God's footstool, and although God presides over other territories embracing the heavenly world, including myriads of angels, yet He has revealed a portion of His mind and will to the earthly sons of Adam, committing this will to tablets of stone and printed in the Scriptures. The psalmist could say, "**I delight to DO THY WILL, O Lord, my God: yea thy law is within my heart.**" (Ps.40:8). Paul prayed that the Colossian Christians "**might be filled with the knowledge OF HIS WILL, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.**" (1:19), and counselled the Ephesians to "**be not unwise, but understanding that THE WILL OF THE LORD IS.**" (5:17). Paul also reminded them that God had "**made known unto you the mystery OF HIS WILL, according to His good pleasure, which He hath proposed in Himself.**" (1:9) Our knowledge of "The Will of God" is obviously limited to what is revealed in the Scriptures. There is no other source of information. If, as Paul exhorts, we are to be "**filled with the knowledge of HIS WILL in all wisdom and spiritual understanding**", then clearly we must apply ourselves to a study of those Scriptures.

There are, however, some plain and straightforward statements as to what God's Will happens to be. Lack of space restricts us to mention only a few. For instance, Paul says "**In everything give thanks, for THIS is the will of God, in Christ concerning you.**" (I Thess.5:18). Again Paul says, "**For THIS is the will of God, even your sanctification**" (I Thess.4:13). Peter says, "**Submit to every ordinance of man... for THIS is the will of God, that by well-doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men**" (I Peter 2:15). Jesus said, "**And THIS is the Father's will that sent Me, that everyone that seeth the Son, and believeth on Him, may have everlasting life.**"

(John 6:40). Other parts of God's will are less plainly stated, of course, but can, with contemplation and study, be readily obtained: the over-riding purpose being that we, having learned God's will might, thereafter, seek to DO IT. There are a great number of scripture passages which stress the need for us to be doers of God's will and not hearers only. Did not Jesus, Himself, say, "**Not everyone that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, but he that DOETH the will of My Father, which is in heaven.**" He also said, "**For whosoever shall DO the will of My Father which is in heaven, the same is My brother, and sister, and mother.**" (Matt.12:50). Peter said, "**The world passeth away, and the lust thereof, but he that DOETH the will of My Father, abideth for ever.**" (I Peter 2:17). Paul exhorted the Ephesians to serve God, "**not with eye-service as men-pleasers, but as the servants of Christ, DOING THE WILL OF GOD from the heart.**" (Eph.6:6). Such passages could be greatly multiplied.

Given that everything stated above is eminently true; that God's will has been revealed in His word, and that we can know it, and do it, yet there seems no doubt that God's will was not to be regarded as being rigidly confined to that which was written. *God, it seems, has a say, each day, in ordinary events:* even the making of a journey. Indeed, when Paul wrote to the Roman Christians he said that often he "**made request if by any means now at length, I might have a prosperous journey BY THE WILL OF GOD to come unto you.**" (Rom.1:10 & 15:32). Likewise he said to the Corinthians, "**But I will come to you shortly, IF the Lord will.**" (I Cor.4:19) and seems to be inferring that if he does not come, it will be because God has not allowed it. Conversely, Paul apologised to the Thessalonians for his non-arrival amongst them and said, "**we would have come unto you, even I, Paul, once again BUT SATAN HINDERED us.**" (I Thess.2:18). And so it seems that Paul considered that ordinary everyday activities could be influenced by God's will, and could even be hindered by Satan's intervention. Paul also believed it was possible for "**Satan to get an advantage of us, for we are not ignorant of his devices.**" (2 Cor.2:11) As we shall see, James concurred with this view, notwithstanding that some commentators have suggested that all this was confined to the N.T. times.

WHAT PETER HAD TO SAY

Peter says, (I Peter 3:17) "**For it is better if THE WILL OF GOD BE SO that ye suffer for well doing than for evil doing**". This again appears to have no direct reference to the written word of God but to *conditions in life*, which, in this case, involved the Christians in persecution and suffering. Surely we cannot imagine that it is the will of God that Christians should suffer, and so Peter must mean that people, trying to live according to the Will of God, might well incur persecution and suffering, as a consequence. Jesus said that His servants would not be above their Master and as He had suffered so would they. Indeed Peter alludes to this in the very next verse and says, "**For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God.**" And so, just as the outworkings of God's eternal purpose involved the suffering of Christ, and His apostles, so likewise might ordinary Christians be called upon to suffer. Accordingly they should rejoice at suffering for doing the will of God: a thing much preferable to suffering for one's own crimes or indiscretions.

In the following chapter, and at verse 19, Peter returns to this theme and says, "**Wherefore let them that suffer ACCORDING TO THE WILL OF GOD commit the keeping of their souls to Him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator.**" Again, "**suffering according to the will of God**" does not infer that God applied the suffering, but that they suffered because they did the will of God. Peter, a few verses

previously, warned about impending persecution, and said, (v.12) **"Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you. But rejoice inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy."** At v.15 he again insists that any suffering must be for the right reasons and says, **"But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief, or as an evil-doer, or as a busy-body in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf."**

WHAT JAMES HAS TO SAY. (4:13)

Many of us are like the travelling merchants described by James (4:13) who made their plans to promote their business here and there, over various periods of time, without giving much thought to what part God might have to play in the matter. Indeed James rebukes such a confident (even boastful) spirit. He says, **"Go to now, ye that say, tomorrow we will go into such a city and continue there a year, and buy and sell and get gain"**. Merchants then, and even today, travelled with their goods in neighbouring towns and remained there until all goods had been sold; even if it took as long as a year. There was nothing wrong with this, of course, apart from *the attitude of mind* which made such plans, with no account taken of God, or of the uncertainty of life. **"Whereas"** says James, **"Ye know not what shall be on the morrow"**. They made these plans quite unaware of what might befall them within an hour, or a day or a week, let alone a year: whether they be alive or dead. Like the confident farmer set on building bigger barns they had no way of knowing that **"that night"** their soul might be required of them. And Solomon said, **"Boast not thyself of tomorrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth."** **"For what is your life?"** says James, **"It is even a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away."** Surely this is a very apt representation of the transiency of life. Quite often on a summer's morning, pockets of mist are to be seen in the hollows, but as the sun comes up they disappear as if they had never been. Our lives are as flimsy as that, and in a hundred years or less no one will ever know that we ever existed. Thus the conclusion of James is that, in the circumstances, **"Ye ought to say, IF THE LORD WILL we shall live, and do this or do that."** Instead of a smug confidence in stating exactly what we shall do this year or next year, we should take account of the fact that life is as tenuous as a vapour. We should also acknowledge our complete dependence upon our Maker for our preservation, and recognise the fact that God might have some say in what we shall do or not do. (I'm sure James did not mean that we should say "If the Lord will" on each and every occasion we make a statement, to the extent of pointless repetition, but certainly meant but that we should always inwardly be taking account of it.) The poet Burns knew what James was saying and observed that "the best laid schemes of mice and men gang aft a-gley."

Paul informed the doubting Athenians that **"in God we live, and move and have our being,"** and Solomon said, **"In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct thy steps."** (Pr.3.6).

SUMMARY

The "Will of God" seems to be a difficult, and even a mysterious, term. As we have seen, God has revealed His will in His word, and it's obviously something we can read, understand and DO. But who can fathom the mind of God, or who can see His outworkings? He is the potter: we are but the clay. **". . . how unsearchable are His judgements, and His ways past finding out. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, or who hath been His counsellor.?"** (Rom.11:33). As the hymnwriter says, God

moves in mysterious ways His wonders to perform. God rescued Paul and Silas with a small earthquake at Philippi, and miraculously brought Peter from a high-security jail, consumed Herod with worms and struck down Ananias and Sapphira. On the other hand, God did not prevent John the Baptist from being beheaded, or James and Stephen from being murdered: or indeed the violent death of some of the other apostles. On one occasion Paul prayed for God's intervention for what seemed an entirely personal matter (a thorn in the flesh) and God refused. And so it would seem that God has His own agenda: although many can look back over their lifetime and can, with confidence, point to where God intervened in their circumstances, not only re-shaping their lives, but saving them from near disaster. We can also be sure that God had no part in the massacre of children at Dunblane, or any tragic car crash. **"God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance"** and although "perish" means a spiritual death, I'm sure God is well aware that premature, and sudden, death precludes any opportunity for repentance.

God is not in that business.

And so, although God's will is written in scripture, there is quite another dimension to be considered: i.e. God's will with regard to our daily lives, a consideration which requires us to plan any future intentions only on the basis **"If the Lord will"**. God must always be in the equation, and we must constantly acknowledge that our very lives are in His hands. By and large, it must be true to say that nearly everybody, not just politicians and public figures, announce their future plans with great confidence but with scant reference to God having any part to play in the matter. They might say that such and such will happen "weather permitting" but are most unlikely to say "God willing". Diana, Princess of Wales, had a very full Appointments Book and a great many charitable projects in hand, but her shocking, grievous and untimely death sadly illustrates that we **"know not what a day might bring"**, or as Peter says, **"We know not what shall be on the morrow"**. Death is certainly no respecter of persons and sadly Diana fell victim to one of the greatest uncertainties of life.

How can we know God's long-term purposes, or those in the short term.? We can't. All we can do is to follow God's word, and engage ourselves in well-doing. When the early disciples asked Jesus about future events, the reply was, **"It is not for you to know the times and seasons which the Lord hath put in His own power"**, and when Peter asked about God's short-term plans for John (i.e. "What shall this man do") the reply was, **"What is that to thee, follow thou Me"**. That is something we can do, and must do - follow Him. All that we can really know is contained in the scriptures, and we can all DO the will of God, as revealed. As far as our own long-term and short-term plans are concerned, we must at all times take God into account knowing that He can, and may, have the final say, in the outcome of our schemes. Man proposes but God disposes. Or as James says, **"Ye ought to say, IF THE LORD WILL, we shall live, and do this, or do that."**

EDITOR.

ETERNITY IN HELL

Love and hate; peace and struggle; joy and sorrow; good and evil; right and wrong; light and darkness; **Heaven and Hell**. Such things are the ingredients of life itself, and in considering after-life or the destination of man, we ought not be surprised to find **two contrasting destinations** presented in Scripture, both of which must be accepted as fact.

To discuss either Heaven or Hell is difficult, and at best our picture of them is limited by our humanness and our physical environment. Since we understand that "flesh and blood" do not inherit Heaven, we must assume the composition and character of Heaven is not physical. This can be understood by the fact that it is the dwelling place of God and we understand that God is **Spirit** not flesh. Therefore, in order to discuss the eventual destination of man, we must assume that the Holy Spirit presents views of it in figurative language descriptive of our present environment in order to help us comprehend the other wordly existence.

This essay will in no way be a complete presentation. It will be incomplete in two ways: One, it will not refer to **all** of the Biblical passages relating to hell; Two, all Biblical references put together will only give us what God considers us capable of knowing, and the reality will have to be left to the final experience.

IMPORTANT TERMS

It seems of first importance to consider our terms. Four Biblical words are used to describe life after death, but all do not have the same meaning: "Hades", a Greek word, and "Sheol", a Hebrew word, mean the same thing. Then there is "Tartarus", (II Peter 2:4), a place of punishment for angels used once, and "Gehenna", the most common of these terms. In our presentation we are talking about **Gehenna** or **Hell**. Yet it is important that we say something about the others, "Hades" and "Sheol" are Biblical terms that seem to refer to the region of departed spirits both good and bad. They refer to an **intermediate state**, immediately after death, and prior to either the ascension of Christ or the final resurrection of the dead.

Although some may dispute that the "parable" of the rich man and Lazarus is meant to describe the reality immediately after death, according to our understanding of the nature of a parable I would expect it provides us with correct insights. If such is the case, Jesus pictures **Hades** (not hell) for in the picture we have two parts, one described as "torment" and the other as "Abraham's bosom." In other words, contrasting places in the intermediate state. This might be extended to the statement Jesus made to the thief on the cross, "**This day you shall be with me in Paradise**". In this particular reference, "Paradise" is the equivalent of "Abraham's Bosom." Thus we would connect this concept with what we read in Acts 2:31, when David spoke of the resurrection of Christ, "**That He was not abandoned in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption**." Some difficulty has arisen in our minds through use of the King James Version of the Bible, which rendered the words "Sheol" and "Hades" as **hell** in many places. This is not supported by the original language in which the Scriptures came to us. So from this point on, we will be talking about **Gehenna** which is correctly translated **Hell**.

FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

The Bible, when speaking of the final state of the unrighteous, is not limited to "Gehenna". Descriptive terms are used to describe the eternal state of the unjust in eternity, and in a sense they oppose each other in literal meaning. Jesus speaks of this state both as a place of outer **darkness** and as a place of **unquenchable fire** (Matthew 8:12; 22:13; 25:30) (Matthew 7:19; 13:40; 25:41). It would seem impossible to literalize Jesus' description of the final state of the unjust. Fire and darkness do not go together in the physical state. Symbolic or figurative language is an essential for describing the unseen and abstract. Christians should be careful and not fall into the trap of simple literalizing. I have heard the view of Hell scoffed at on talk shows as well-meaning defenders of what it represents failed to take into account the great difference between living in our dimension and that of God or Satan, and the difficulty of description.

GEHENNA

The word "Gehenna" is mentioned by Jesus twelve times in the Gospels and often described as fire. Like many words, this one seems to have a root connected with an actual place. The Valley of Tophet, outside Jerusalem, is called **Gehinnom** in Hebrew. In our Bibles, it is referred to as the Valley of Hinnom. At one time this valley was the worship area of the followers of Moloch, who burned their children on the Temple altars. Josiah, the reforming king of Judah, destroyed the temple of Moloch and converted the valley into the garbage dump of Jerusalem (II Kings 23). As dumps of this type are inclined to do, it caught fire and burned continually, casting a pall of smoke over the valley. It is interesting that some researchers speak of a worm which adapted to this horrible environment which did not burn. It is from this situation that the word "Hell" seems to have derived.

THE NATURE OF HELL

Whatever terms we use, they do point to an everlasting destination for all that is evil... a place **completely separated** from God. If the words of Jesus are understood correctly, God did not create this place for man, but **"for the devil and his angels."** (Matthew 25:41). This implication is that man, by use of his will, makes decisions which determine whom he will follow, Satan or God. Those who disregard the grace of God and the way of God are considered to be Satanists freely given in service to him, and subject to final placement in Hell.

Space does not permit full treatment of this subject, and it would seem that the most important concept of Hell is its awful everlasting character.

Fire and burning brings to mind an agonizing experience, and to think in terms of it being an everlasting experience is devastating. Utter darkness carries with it an equally horrible idea of the loss of sight, beauty and awesome existence. What are these terms representing? It seems to me that they represent **life without God**. No matter what our relationship with God is in this life, we are all beneficiaries of those things which make up the joy and goodness of life. James says, **"Every good endowment and every perfect gift is from above"** (James 1:16-17). **"God is light and in Him is no darkness at all"** (I John 1:5).

But visualize existence without Him. In Hell there will be no access to God... no answered prayer... no hope... no joy... nothing but frustration, despair, grief, sorrow, helplessness and a loveless state. An existence without God is one without love, for **"God is love"** (I John 4:8). WE do not have to concern ourselves about specific meaning of terms when we understand Hell to be a **place where God is not**. Companions will be the devil and his angels. A place of tears and sorrow, it will be a world of hate, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness; for it will be a place of confined evil. This will be the horror of the place.

THE PRICE OF HOPE

The reality of and horrors of hell are clearly shown in what God had to do through His Son to give us an opportunity to escape. In contemplating hell, we often get caught up in the physical concept, as we do with the death of Jesus. The horrors Jesus faced were not the physical pain of the cross, but the spiritual agony, being a sinner tho' He had committed no sin. He bore the guilt of sin and the horrors of sin in that moment of separation from His Father when He said **"My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?"**

This is Hell, the eternal separation from God and all that it means. May we rejoice not in that there is a hell prepared for the devil and his angels, but in the fact of God's grace through Jesus and his patient waiting, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (II Peter 3:8-13).

FORGIVE

It sometimes seems that one of the most difficult abilities for Christians to acquire is that of forgiving brethren that have offended them. At the same time, it is absolutely essential that we must develop this ability if we are to be accounted as righteous in the eyes of our heavenly Father. Jesus does not even encourage us to ask God for forgiveness of our own sins while we are holding grudges against others.

It is highly significant that He included this principle, in the sample prayer that He gave His disciples in response to their request that He teach them to pray. **"Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors"** (Matt. 6:12). That He was using the word "debts" primarily of unpaid spiritual or moral obligations is clear from the comment with which He immediately followed the prayer. **"For if ye forgive men their trespasses (sideslips, lapses or deviations, i.e., (unintentional) errors or (wilful) transgressions. - Strong), your heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses"** (vv. 14,15). This contains no loophole or escape clause. Only those who forgive will be forgiven. No alternate route to forgiveness is acceptable.

In Mark 11:25,26, we find the thought expressed in the form of a positive command, followed with a warning of what will happen if we ignore the command. **"When ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses."**

Nothing in the Scriptures suggest that our spiritual obligation to forgive those who offend us has any relationship to whether or not they deserve to be forgiven. Neither is there a limit placed on the number of times that the Lord expects us to forgive them. When Peter indirectly suggested that he thought that it would be going to a **generous extreme** to forgive the same person seven times, Jesus replied, **"I say not unto thee, Until seven times; but Until seventy times seven"** (Matt. 18:22).

RIGHTEOUS INDIGNATION?

Are you expecting to be saved without having forgiven those that you feel have trespassed against you? As a precaution, it may be wise to make a long, thoughtful and prayerful appraisal of your attitude toward them.

The Apostle James pointed out an obvious but often ignored truth when he wrote, **"My beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God"** (James 1:19,20). Wrath and forgiveness are not compatible. They simply cannot dwell in the same heart at the same time. It is impossible for them to agree on a course of action. Wrath says of its object: "Hurt, punish, humiliate, destroy!" Forgiveness says of the forgiven: "Comfort, strengthen, guide, save!"

Applying a pseudoscriptural euphemism to our anger in no way lessens its capacity to bring about evil results. Much that parades under the name of **"righteous indignation"** is only old-fashioned anger trying to make itself respectable in the Christian Church. Indeed it is extremely difficult to find the term "righteous indignation" anywhere in the Bible. The indignation of God is several times mentioned, and we know that He is always righteous in His ways. Unhappily the same cannot be said of the indignation of men. Indeed when the word is used in connection with the emotions of men, it is accompanied by evil companions. **"Unto them that are contentious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil"** (Rom. 2:8).

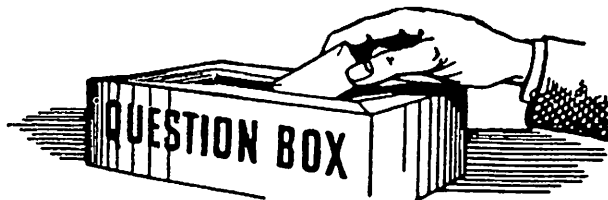
Indignation, wrath, anger, or vindictive acts never work the righteousness of God.

"Be ye angry, and sin not; let not the sun go down upon your wrath: neither give place to the devil" (Eph. 4:26,27).

"If you are angry, do not let anger lead you into sin; do not let sunset find you still nursing it; leave no loophole for the devil" (N.E.B.).

"Never go to bed angry - Don't give the devil that sort of foothold" Eph. 4:26,27. (Philips Translation).

J. PHILLIPS.



Conducted by
Frank Worgan

(First, allow me to express my personal appreciation of the excellent work done for so long by brother Alf Marsden, who was a dear personal friend for over 60 years; and for the way in which brother Ian Davidson so competently took over the task of answering questions, when Alf laid down his pen. Each of these two brethren had/his own distinctive style of writing which I shall not try to copy, as I am sure you will appreciate.

May I also thank our Editor for inviting me to offer a contribution from what I have learned during a period of 56 years in the preaching and teaching of the Word and in serving as an Elder. It is my own sincere prayer that I may be able to offer answers which will be edifying and constructive and I request your prayers, also to this end.

I have before me a list of about 20 questions, all waiting for answers! Obviously they cannot all be dealt with at once, and so I ask those who provided them to exercise a little patience. I shall do my best, eventually, to get round to all of them.)

"Is there a long time-gap between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2?"

This is a brief, but most important, question which has an interesting background.

1. In 1814 Thomas Chalmers, a Scottish preacher, sought to reconcile what he supposed was a conflict between Science and the Bible. Like many others, both before his time and since, he was at a loss to account for the age of the Dinosaurs and the other now-extinct 'monsters', along with the fossil fuels upon which we depend so heavily today, and he sought to resolve the problem by suggesting that there is indeed, a time gap between the first and second verses of Genesis ch. 1.

2. His 'Catastrophe Theory', as it was called, suggested that v. 2 should be rendered 'and the Earth *became* without form and void.' He achieved this translation by changing the word *havah* = 'was', to *hayah* = 'became.'

His theory assumed that there had been a former Creation during which there existed these strange creatures to which the name '*deino saurus*', or 'terrible lizard' has been given, but which was overwhelmed by some sort of catastrophe, so that 'the Earth *became* without form and void.'

3. To support his theory, Chalmers used Isaiah 45:18; 'God created not the Earth in vain', (or void or waste, or as the R.S.V. renders it, 'chaos).

But the next line reveals the true meaning of that statement. 'He formed it to be inhabited!' (R.S.V.). In other words, God did not create the Earth to no purpose, but with the intention that it should be occupied.

4. Sometimes, Gen. 1:28 is also advanced as support for Chalmers' theory; 'Be fruitful and replenish the Earth (A.V.). But the word 'replenish', in this context does not mean 're-fill', but is the translation of the word '*male*' which simply means 'fill-up'. God gave the first human beings the command to populate the planet which He had prepared for them.

5. As for the explanation proposed by Chalmers; it is sufficient to say that there is no linguistic evidence to support it, and it has always been rejected by the majority of translators and Hebrew scholars.

6. Of course, it *is* possible that there was a time-lapse between vv. 1 and 2! Recognising that 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the Earth', we have no way of knowing at what point in time He proceeded to bring order out of the chaos of the beginning. What is more to the point; we have no need to know! 'In the beginning' God created. And we cannot go any farther back than 'the beginning'.

"Should an Elder be married, with believing children? Does this mean that a brother with only one believing child is excluded from the Eldership?"

I wish every question could be answered as emphatically as the one posed in the first sentence! 1st Tim. 3:2-4, and Titus, 1:6 are passages which say all that needs to be said in its reply.

The controversy inevitably arises over the second question, touching as it does, on the meaning of the word 'children', as seen in 1st Tim. 3:4.

1. First consider the word 'children'. Its root is the word '*Teknon*', which, in classical Greek was used to mean '*to take as one's child*' (Liddell & Scott, p. 1406).

Furthermore, it is a word which represents both plural and singular numbers, in a somewhat similar sense in which our word 'sheep' may be used to indicate one animal, or many.

In Luke 1:7 we are told that Zechariah and Elizabeth 'had no *child*'. Here '*teknon*' is used to, indicate the singular number. If *we* were speaking of a couple in a similar situation we might have said they 'had no *children*'. The word is used in a similar sense in Acts 7:5, with reference to Abraham; 'though he had no *child*'.

Sometimes '*teknon*' is used in the sense of '*offspring*', without indicating either sex or number. In John 8:39, Jesus tells the Jews, 'If you were Abraham's children (*tekna*)'. ...!

2. To illustrate the difficulty with which we are faced when dealing with the 'child' versus 'children' problem consider this; If someone were to say, 'Will all those who have *children* please leave the room', would those who have only *one child* feel they ought to remain?

Or similarly, if we were to say, 'If you have *a child*, please stand', would those who had several *children* feel obliged to remain seated?

3. We have, in discussing the qualifications for Eldership, become so caught up - or bogged down - in arguments as to the number of offspring required of a prospective Elder, that we have neglected to give proper attention to the really crucial matter. We have neglected to give serious thought to the *reason* why the Holy Spirit imposes this qualification. A man's ability to father children is no qualification for the most important work on earth!

Bear in mind the lists of qualifications found in Timothy and Titus are pre-eminently practical and functional and have a bearing on the responsibilities the Eldership is called upon to bear, and the work these men are required to fulfil.

There is not a single spiritual quality or virtue required of an Elder, which is not also imposed by the Holy Spirit on every individual believer, as he seeks to become like his Lord.

The outstanding difference is that, of an Elder, certain qualifications relating to maturity and experience are also required.

4. Consider the question, why does the Holy Spirit mention 'children'? He does it because the Elder must be a man whose experience of marital and domestic life must be such as can be transferred to the effective fulfilment of the task of caring care of God's own family, the Church.

In 1st Tim. 3:5, Paul asks a question, the answer to which is self-evident.

If a man does not know how to manage his own household, how can he possibly care for the family of God? This, it should be noted, effectively disposes of that other question which is sometimes raised; 'May a single man be appointed an Elder'.

5. Notice, however, that the Holy Spirit does not stipulate *how many* children an Elder must have. If, as is sometimes claimed, *one* child is not enough to qualify a man to serve as an Elder, must he have *two* children? Or *three*? Or *four*? At what point are we satisfied? And who has the authority to say?

6. Futhermore, is the man who is the father of *five* children, *thereby* better qualified for Eldership than the man who has only *two* children - or *one*? Are there qualities to be found in a man who has raised five children, which the one-child father lacks?

Is not the same degree of love and care shown in the raising of one child as in the raising of five?

I raise these questions to stimulate a more focussed consideration of what is, admittedly, a thorny issue. At all times we must be most careful, lest we begin to superimpose our own requirements upon those which the Spirit Himself has already laid down.

7. Remember, also, that any Eldership will almost certainly consist of men whose families vary in size. In other words, they are highly unlikely to have the same number of children. But this is hardly relevant, because an Eldership functions as a body, in which each man contributes his own particular experience and ability.

For instance, whilst the Holy Spirit says that a Elder must be '*didactic*', that is, 'able to teach', we all know very well that, in an Eldership, some will almost certainly be more competent in teaching and preaching than their fellow-Elders.

Because a scriptural Eldership consists of a plurality, its members complement each other, even though all possess the qualifications laid down by the Holy Spirit, in 'larger or lesser' degree. (I put it in these words for want of a better expression).

We have, for too long, been negative in our handling of the subject of Eldership, with the result that, sad to say, there are a few congregations among us which have been able to appoint a scriptural oversight. We simply have not encouraged men to 'desire the office of a bishop'. (The word desire is the word '*horizo*', which means, 'to reach out after').

And so we continue to pay the price of failure, because we have produced 'oversights' which consist of men who are deemed 'unqualified' to be appointed Elders, but who virtually function as Elders! Brethren! we need to change!

(All questions, please, to Frank Worgan, 5 Gryfembank Way,
Houston, Johnstone, Renfrewshire. PA6 7NZ.)

NOTHING DOUBTING

As frail human creatures we are sure, at times, to have the occasional attack of doubt. The basic cause of such doubt stems, of course, from that fallen angel: Satan. It is one of the agencies of the Devil, to create doubt in the mind, and draw away the disciple from his confident belief.

Doubt can affect us two ways: it can either stunt our spiritual growth or it can spur us on eventually to a greater depth of faith. It seldom leaves us the same as we were before. What is doubt? It is usually only of a temporary nature and arises from thoughts which cause us to waver, to be uncertain about an opinion or belief. Eventually we become withdrawn, pensive, even suspicious and lack conviction, confidence and trust. Even the greatest prophet of all, John the Baptist, had his wavering moments and, on one occasion, sent his disciples to Jesus to ask if He really was the One who was to come, or was he to look further afield for another.

Even a very small child can be coaxed to jump off a wall into the loving arms of a parent. The jump, to the child, is dangerous but the trust in the parent is strong and the child focuses its attention on the outstretched arms. Quite often our faith in God's outstretched arm is blurred by our attention spending too long upon the dangers and the doubts. In simple words, beloved, we often tend to let our eyes stray from God, Jesus and the Church and fall victim to our doubts. An added doubt is sometimes the result of **doubting ourselves**, doubting our own judgement, our own abilities and our own strength. This may cause us to fear and fear can have a serious affect on us: so do take care, brethren. When confidence in self breaks down we tend to 'set up camp' not wanting to venture for the Lord or take any risks. No advance in life takes place. We need to remember verse 4 of the 23rd Psalm, "**Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.**"

WHY SHOULD WE DOUBT?

Christ's own disciples, as close as they were to Jesus daily, had often to be warned about doubt. When Peter tried to walk on the water and began to sink Jesus caught him by the hand and said, "**O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt**"? This is always a good question. Why should we doubt? sometimes doubts are born of waning belief. We need to know but also to **believe** the truth. Sometimes doubts are born of disobedience, and so we must be obedient, as never before: time is running out; God still cares; if in doubt call upon God. Again, doubt sometimes comes to us when we are at a low ebb in morale and even in poor health (as was probably the case with John the Baptist). We are perhaps physically and / or mentally run down and we begin to waver in our faithfulness. We might even separate ourselves from our God and from prayer. We might even contemplate separating ourselves from our brethren and from the Church. He that thinks he standeth must beware lest he fall. Let us take care lest we fall. the best way to keep doubt at bay is to be strong in the faith (putting on the whole armour of God. Eph. 6) and by keeping busy in the Lord's work (always abounding in the work of the Lord).

We must take note that God never withdraws His love from us: it is we who withdraw ourselves from God (sometimes knowingly, sometimes not). Someone has said:-

"Whoso draws nigh to God one step
though doubting Him;
God will advance a mile,
in blazing light to him."

ANDREW SHARPE, Newtongrange.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Nov. 2	Isaiah 64	1 Cor. 1-26 to 2:16
Nov. 9	Psalm 94	1 Cor. 3
Nov. 16	Psalm 17	1 Cor. 4
Nov. 23	Deut. 16:8 to 17:7	1 Cor. 5
Nov. 30	Gen. 2:4-25	1 Cor. 6

WISDOM FROM THE SPIRIT

A philosopher is, literally, a lover of wisdom. The word "philosopher" comes from the Greek words: *Philos*, loving and *sophos*, wise, a sage. There have been many great philosophers in the history of the world. Ancient Greece had more than its fair share. The teachings, for example, of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle are still discussed and debated today. All of them predated Jesus. But Moses predated all of them. Alexander Campbell once wrote: "The history of the whole matter is this: The Romans borrowed from the Greeks, the Greeks stole from the Egyptians and the Phoenicians, while they borrowed from the Chaldeans and the Assyrians, who stole from the Abrahamic family all their notions of the spirituality, eternity and unity of God, the primitive state of man, his fall, sacrifice, priests, altars. immortality of the soul, a future state eternal judgment and the ultimate retribution of all men according to their works."

The wisdom of men is nothing compared with the wisdom of God. I have a lot of books on philosophy on my shelves, but I must keep everything in perspective. That is why I must study the Bible as often as I can because it reveals the eternal wisdom of God. Once this wisdom was hidden, but it has now come to light (2:7). Of course, to those who do not possess the Spirit of Christ then God's wisdom is foolishness (2:14).

To them it appears too simple and too base. "But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty . . ." (1:27).

Man can learn three ways - by seeing, by hearing and by using his rational powers. What man cannot learn in using these three methods God has to reveal them by His Spirit. Paul, therefore, wrote: "But as it is written, Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love Him. But God has revealed them unto us by His Spirit: for the Spirit searches all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knows no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of of the world, but the Spirit who is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God" (2:9-12). So it is clear. Revelation is one of the functions of the Holy Spirit. It is wonderful that God has taken a mystery (2:7) and made a revelation out of it; it is tragic that men have taken God's revelation and made a mystery out of it.

One other point I would like to make here. A better understanding of the Spirit of God means a better understanding of the spirit of man. I like what Martin Luther once said: "The spirit is the highest and noblest part of man, which qualifies him to lay hold of the comprehensible, invisible, eternal things; in short, it is the house where faith and God's word are at home."

DIVISIONS IN THE CHURCH

The Corinthian Church was badly divided. This was the work of the flesh

and not of the Spirit. The saints manifested such immaturity that Paul referred to them as "babes" (3:1). They elevated men rather than Jesus. And what great men they were! Paul himself, Apollos and Peter (3:4,22). But all these were but humble servants of the Master in heaven. Jesus is who mattered. After all, He is the root of the whole plant, the foundation of the whole building and the centre of the whole system. Brethren, we today have much to learn from these errors in the past. But have we learned?

The community of Jesus is one of these most divided on earth. This is a tragedy because the salvation of the world hinges upon the unity of believers in Christ (John 17:21). Let me give some statements on unity and division from my files. "The party spirit is insidious and delusive." "Division is not once commended in the Scriptures." "The only way to cure our divisions is to resolve never to create or promote another one and to work to eliminate those which we have inherited." "God is for unity; Satan is for division." "Problems should not be approached with cold hearts and hot heads, but with warm hearts and cool heads." "The more we fight, the more we are divided; the more we are divided, the more we are fighting. It is time for those who have grown up to demonstrate it by healing the breaches, repairing the rents and proclaiming peace."

APOSTLES OF CHRIST

In chapter four I detect a certain irony in the statements by Paul. Apostolic humility is compared with their pride, self-satisfaction and feeling of superiority. I like the picture Paul paints. "For I think that God has set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made

spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men" (4:9). "When a Roman general won a great victory he was allowed to parade his victorious army through the streets of the city with all the trophies that he had won: the procession was called a Triumph. But at the end there came a little group of captives who were doomed to death; they were taken to the arena to fight with the beasts and so to die. The Corinthians in their blatant pride were like the conquering general displaying the trophies of his prowess; the apostles were like the little group of captives doomed to die. To the Corinthians the Christian life meant flaunting their privileges and reckoning up their achievement; to Paul it meant humble service and a readiness to die for Christ" (Barclay).

Paul had sent Timothy, "who will bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, as I teach every where in every Church" (4:17). Timothy was one of Paul's closest companions and is a man worthy of much study and analysis. He is a very important character in New Testament history. Paul loved him and regarded him as faithful in the Lord (4:17).

EXPEL THE IMMORAL BROTHER!

Sexual immorality in Corinth was common-place. The city had a terrible reputation for wickedness, depravity and vice. The Church itself was not immune from the society surrounding it. Paul had to address a situation that had not occurred even among the pagans - that a man was having sexual relations with his father's wife (step-mother). Action had to be taken immediately. He had to be excommunicated. "When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and

the power of the Lord Jesus is present, hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord . . . Expel the wicked man from among you" (5:4-5,13, N.I.V.). Paul emphasised that the saints had to disassociate themselves with those who were guilty of sexual immorality, greed, idolatry, slander, drunkenness and swindling (5:11). What sins are new! An important point is that there is every indication that this particular excommunicated individual later repented and returned to the congregation (2 Corinthians 2:5-11). In other words, the strict discipline proved effective. The right thing was done in the right way.

LAWSUITS AMONG BELIEVERS

The Greeks in Paul's day enjoyed going to the law courts. It was all part of their daily entertainment. It has been truly said that every man in an ancient Greek city was his own lawyer and spent a lot of time deciding or listening to law cases. Is it any surprise that the Church was affected by all this? Paul, however, was horrified by the litigation going on among the saints. The saints were different and disputes, therefore, should be settled honourably among them (6:5). The courts of unbelievers should be kept out of it. He wrote: "Why do you not rather take wrong? Why do you not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded?" (6:7). The first of these questions has to do with personal injury; the second with property injury. One commentator put it this way: "We take wrong when someone speaks evil of us; we suffer ourselves to be defrauded when we permit another to take what is rightfully ours, and is not rightfully or legally his."

IAN S. DAVIDSON,
Motherwell.

TEST YOUR BIBLICAL KNOWLEDGE

1. Who was Potiphar?
2. From which tribe did Moses come?
3. Of what was Goliath's armour made?
4. Who, as an infant, was left under a bush to die?
5. How long did Jacob work for Rachel?
6. Who was the son of Cush?
7. Who reigned after Herod?
8. Who introduced Saul to the apostles in Jerusalem?
9. Which is the shortest book of the New Testament?
10. Which two men wrapped Jesus' body prior to His burial?

COMING EVENTS

NEWTONGRANGE: The Church at Newtongrange extends a warm welcome to their ANNUAL SOCIAL to be held (D.V.) on Saturday, 4th October, 1997, at 4.00 p.m. The speakers will be Bro. Harry McGinn (New Cumnock) and Bro. Niall Scobbie (Dennyloanhead). Please let us know by Saturday, 20th September if you can be with us on that day.

MARGARET HUNTER,
(Secretary)

126th ANNIVERSARY MEETING Kentish Town Anniversary Meeting

Saturday, 11th October, 1997

3.00 p.m. and 6.30 p.m.

Tea 4.45 p.m.

Speaker: Graham Gorton

All Welcome

KIRKCALDY LADIES DAY

on Saturday, 18th April, 1998

NEWS FROM THE CHURCHES

SLAMANNAN DISTRICT: The Quarterly Mutual Benefit Meeting of the Slamannan and District took place in Motherwell Meeting House on Saturday, 6th September, 1997, where the subject was "Does Acts 15:19,20 (abstaining from blood) require us to abstain from 'black pudding' and the like?" The speakers were Bill Cook, Dunfermline and Jimmy Grant, Wallacestone, (replacing Ian Davidson) and the Chairman was Graeme Scobbie, Dennyloanhead. As usual the question raised many unexpected and thought-provoking facets and a very interesting discussion followed. God willing, our next meeting will be at Tranent on December, 6th, when the question will be, "Where do the righteous and the wicked go at death?" The Speakers will be Ian Davidson, Motherwell and David Chalmers, Ayr, with Mark Plain, Tranent, as Chairman. Once again we thank the sisters at Motherwell for their excellent refreshments.

HARRY MCGINN,
(Secretary)

PERSISTENCE

Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence.

Talent will not, for there is nothing so common as the successful man with talent.

Genius will not, for unrewarded genius is almost a proverb.

Education alone will not, for the world is full of educated derelicts.

Persistence and determination alone, are omnipotent.

CALVIN COOLRIDGE
(1872-1933)

-
10. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus (John 19:38-40).
9. 2 John.
8. Barnabas (Acts 9:27).
7. Archelaus (Matthew 2:22).
6. Zephaniah (1:1).
5. 14 years (Genesis 29:30).
4. Ishmael (Genesis 21:15-16).
3. Bronze (1 Samuel 17:5).
2. Levi (Exodus 6:18-20).
1. Captain of Pharaoh's guard (Genesis 37:36).

ANSWERS

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