

The SCRIPTURE STANDARD

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

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NEVER SAY NEVER

A week or two ago, I received through the letter box, a fairly large and well-produced religious tract. On the front page in very large letters over an inch in height, was the word "NEVER". Upon reading the contents of the tract I discovered that the word "NEVER" had reference to two questions dealt with in the tract, and I quote, "(1) Can the man or woman who dies in unbelief, ever be saved? Mark the solemn scriptural answer – NEVER! (2) Can the man or woman who has been born again of the Spirit of God ever be lost? Mark the scriptural answer – NEVER!" (Unquote).

There is insufficient space to comment upon both questions (and answers) especially in the absence of any definition of the term "unbelief" or "born again of the Spirit," but I would like to take issue with the answer given to question (2) i.e. "Can the man or woman who has been born again of the Spirit of God ever be lost? – NEVER!" This answer is, of course, embraced within what is generally known as the "once-saved; always-saved" doctrine, and is a point of view we encounter from time to time.

In general, we should, perhaps be careful about our use of the word "NEVER." Not so long ago some very prominent politicians had to admit, publicly, their careless use of the term and are now, obviously, giving the word much more respect. Both Mrs. Thatcher and Mr. Major (albeit there are many others) have learned the fallacy and the presumption of stating things that they would "NEVER" say, or "NEVER" do, and have had to eat humble pie. There is nothing new in this, of course, but every now and again we have to be reminded of the indiscreet use of "never". Indeed there is now such an awareness of this that nearly all politicians are quick to assure the electorate that they would never say "never". I am, of course, well aware that the religious tract bases its conclusions upon God's inspired and holy word, and is certainly not concerned with the words of politicians, but even under these circumstances it might be unwise for us to say what God can "NEVER" do. Certainly God means what He says in His word, but God is also completely sovereign and just as He has power to make laws He has a similar power to suspend them in certain cases: according to His will. We can not limit the power of God, even if we were to try. God says to any who may question His judgement (or apparent lack of consistency) "I will be gracious unto whom I will be gracious, and I will show mercy on whom I will show mercy." (Ex. 33:19). Jesus also signified His own sovereignty in His conversation with Peter (in John 21). Jesus had just described to Peter how he (Peter) would die. Peter upon seeing John (the disciple whom Jesus loved and who was allowed to lean on

Jesus' breast) asked, "And what shall this man do" but was softly rebuked and told that if Jesus chose to preserve John alive for all time Jesus could do so, and it would be nobody's business. "What is that to thee" said Jesus "Follow Me." Bearing in mind this mild caution to be slow to describe what God can "NEVER" do, we do acknowledge, however, that we must at all times be guided and governed solely by the scriptures.

A ROARING LION AND GRIEVOUS WOLVES

What then, does God's inspired word have to say about the assertion made in the religious tract that a person "born again by the Spirit of God" can NEVER be lost. The author of the tract, described by the initials "G.C." quotes as proof text John 10:27,28, which says "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me, and I will give unto them eternal life; and they shall NEVER PERISH neither shall anyone pluck them out of My hand." The tract is fairly lengthy, and obviously I have not the space to quote much of it, but to be fair to the writer of it, I should quote a part where he admits that "Backsliding" may take place. (Quote) "CAN A SHEEP BACKSLIDE? Yes. If it does is it still eternally secure - Yes! Why? . . . What is the secret of their being kept thus secure? Is it their love, or their faithfulness? NO! NO! NO! (Unquote) Thus, according to G.C. even the "backsliding" sheep (whatever his definition of backsliding may be) will never be lost.

Obviously no rational person is going to question the truthfulness of John 10:28 (quoted above) but many I am sure, would certainly want to question the interpretation put upon it by G.C.. Clearly John 10:28 says, in effect, that the sheep who hear Christ's voice and who follow Him will receive eternal life, will thereby never perish, and will never be plucked from Christ's grasp. No one would argue with that. But what about the wayward sheep who wander from the fold? The apostle Peter warned Christians (those "born again") to "Be sober, be vigilant, for your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour." Why should Satan be a problem if people can never be lost? Why should Peter warn in this way, and call for sobriety and vigilance if those born again can NEVER PERISH? The truth is that the devil takes pleasure in "devouring" anybody; but especially Christians.

But Christ's sheep must not only beware of the marauding lion, but must also be careful to avoid the soul-destroying activities of false teachers. The apostle Paul, (in a passage which, incidently, equates Christ's sheepfold with Christ's church) tearfully warns the elders of the church at Ephesus thus; "Feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you NOT SPARING THE FLOCK. Also of your selves, shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears." (Acts 20:28-31). Clearly Paul did not share G.C.'s view that the SHEEP in Christ's SHEEPFOLD (the Church) were inviolate and could NEVER PERISH; rather the reverse.

Paul here predicts that, after His departure Christ's SHEEP would be decimated by grievous wolves (false teachers). Nor was it just a slight impression that Paul harboured, but he was so sure of it that he had warned night and day, over a period of three years, with tears. Why shed "tears" if the SHEEP can not be lost?

Reverting again to the apostle Peter, we read, "Wherefore, brethren, give the more diligence to make your calling and election sure, for if ye do these things, ye shall never stumble." (2 Peter 1:10). If, as the tract says, we can never be lost, even if we "backslide", what could possibly render our calling unsure? Yet Peter, an inspired apostle, writing to those "born again", urges them not only to be diligent, but to increase their diligence: to what end? That they might make their salvation SURE.

Common logic should tell us that if it takes our own efforts of diligence to make our calling SURE; lack of such diligence must make our calling very UNSURE. Peter described the form our diligence should take; i.e. "DOING THINGS." He says, "For IF ye DO these things, ye shall never stumble." What things? They were to add to their "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." They were to "do these things" to make their calling Sure, and so that they might never stumble: implying that failure to do these things would put their calling in jeopardy, and might cause them to stumble. ("G.C." might say that although we may "stumble" we cannot "fall"; but this is answered in the following subhead).

WHY WARN IF THERE'S NO DANGER ?

It is quite often suggested, when this issue is being discussed, that Christians who fall away, or who do not remain faithful, were never really Christians in the first place. This, of course, begs the question as to how someone can "fall" from a position they never occupied. Paul, for instance, warned Christians at Corinth, "Wherefore, let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." (1 Cor. 10:12). If Christians could never "fall" Paul's admonition was bizarre language indeed. This warning came from Paul as he recounted to the Church how God's people of old (Israel) incurred the wrath of God, brought upon themselves, in the wilderness, when they so often tempted God with their murmuring, idolatry and immorality. Paul says, "Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples; and they are written for OUR admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed, LEST HE FALL." We can stumble, and Yes, we can fall.

It is difficult to imagine that Paul was addressing people who were "never Christians in the first place." If, for instance, we go to the opening verses of that epistle we find that Paul's words were addressed to ". . . the Church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints with all that in every place call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, our Lord, both theirs and ours." How can anyone say that the Church at Corinth, those "sanctified IN CHRIST JESUS"; those who are "called to be saints"; and those "who in every place have called upon the name of Christ" were never Christians in the first place? Yet these "born again" Christians were the ones receiving Paul's warning that they could "fall."

Again, when writing to the Church at Ephesus, Paul addressed his warnings and exhortations to "The saints which are at Ephesus and to THE FAITHFUL IN JESUS CHRIST. . ." This also is hardly an accurate description of those who were never Christians to begin with. Paul addressed his epistle to the Christians at Rome, "To all that be in Rome, BELOVED OF GOD, CALLED TO BE SAINTS." To the church at Colosse Paul wrote, "To the saints and FAITHFUL BRETHREN IN CHRIST which are at Colosse." To those at Thessalonica Paul wrote, "Unto the church at Thessalonica which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ. For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but in power and in the Holy Spirit . . . and ye became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit." The apostles were not wasting time speaking to those who were never Christians in the first place; but were deadly serious in warning those who were "faithful brethren in Christ" to remain faithful.

This is emphatically confirmed by what Jesus, Himself, said in John 15:2-6 (just a few Chapters on from the proof-text of "G.C".) Jesus said, "Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit, He taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit . . . (v.6) If a man abide not in Me he is cast forth as a branch and is withered, and they gather them and cast them into the fire

and they are burned.” Jesus refers to “Every branch **IN ME** that beareth not fruit He taketh away . . .” Those who say that those who fall away were never actually “In Christ” have to reckon with this declaration of Jesus. Christ says that any branches “**In Me**” that remain fruitless will be removed and cast forth as a branch, gathered up, and eventually burned. This, to me, seems a far cry from the emphatic declaration by G.C. that even backsliders can “**NEVER PERISH**”, and illustrates again how necessary it is to take all relevant scripture into account before coming to strong conclusions. It is not enough, (albeit quite easy to do) to take a scripture in isolation and make it appear to say something never intended. Jesus never ever contradicted Himself and what Jesus says here in John 15:2-6 certainly does not contradict what He said in John 10:27,28 (the proof-text). Surely there’s no difficulty in reconciling these two passages. Those sheep in the sheepfold who remain faithful will receive everlasting life and will never perish: those sheep who succumb to false teachers, the wiles of Satan, disbelief, unfruitfulness or lack of diligence will fall and “**WILL PERISH**”.

DANGER OF UNBELIEF

Thus far we have seen that the world is a very dangerous place for “born again” Christians. There are, inter alia, dangers from Satan, dangers from false teachers, dangers from lack of diligence and from unfruitfulness. There is also the added danger of UNBELIEF.

In Hebrew 3.12 we read, “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any one of you **AN EVIL HEART OF UNBELIEF** in departing from the living God.” The writer has just been reminding the Christians of the many instances, chronicled in the O.T., of infidelity to God on the part of Israel, and is urging them not to fall by the same form of unbelief. He adds, “Let us therefore fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into His rest any of you should seem to come short of it” (4:1) and at (v.11) says, “Let us labour, therefore, to enter into that rest lest any man should **FALL** after the same manner of unbelief”.

The apostle Peter, speaking of the “Born again” says, “For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.” (2 Peter 2:20). Again by no stretch of the imagination can we say that Peter refers to those who were never Christians in the first place. They had “escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of Christ” but had again become entangled and overcome.

The writer to the Hebrews echoes these words when he says, “For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit. And have tasted of the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come. **IF THEY SHOULD FALL AWAY** to renew them again to repentance seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh and put Him to an open shame.” (Heb. 6:6). Again the writer is not referring to the sheep who were never sheep to start with, but is talking about those who “had been enlightened”; those “who had tasted of the heavenly gift” (Christ); those who “**HAD BEEN PARTAKERS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**” and those who “had tasted of the good word of God” “If such should fall away” (something clearly seen as a real possibility) it would be impossible to renew them to repentance.

I apologise to readers for the tedium of having to repeat so often that the N.T. writers addressed their warnings to faithful Christians (even to those who had been partakers of the Holy Spirit). This has been necessary because G.C. and his friends

do insist that sheep which perish were never Christ's sheep in any case. This doctrine of "once saved; always saved" is quite widely held in some communities but is unscriptural and dangerous. It gives a false sense of security.

CONCLUSION

Space has more than gone and I have merely scratched the surface of the subject and have not even had time to mention the parables. Many of the parables, and certainly the parable of the sower, envisage that many will receive the good seed but will come to grief through the deceitfulness of riches or the cares of this world. Surely the parable of the "talents" also tells us that the slothful and unfruitful servants will incur the wrath of the Master and will be cast out amid tears and gnashing of teeth. Neither have the letters from Christ to the seven churches (in the Revelation) been mentioned, where several times "born again" Christians are advised to repent or take the consequences, and where, in the case of the Laodiceans, some would be spewed out of Christ's mouth. All of this is surely strange language indeed, if even backsliding sheep will "NEVER PERISH."

Perhaps in closing, we should quote Paul's words in Romans 8:35 (a passage often used by those, like "G.C." who teach that no one can be lost) "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? (None of these things can separate us from Christ's love, but as we saw earlier, unbelief can, and so can the pollutions of this world); But Paul continues "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." No force whatsoever, whether good or bad, whether now or in the future, can separate us from God's love: and the only way in which men and women can be separated from God's love is by their own action; or by their own inaction. Yes, WE ourselves; We can separate ourselves from the love of Christ. Paul, himself, always conscious of this everpresent danger shows us just how very seriously he took the matter. He says "But I keep under, my body, and keep it in subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I MYSELF SHOULD BE A CASTAWAY" (1 Cor. 9:27). Unlike G.C. Paul never said "Never."

EDITOR.

GLEANINGS

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

KNOWING

I know the sorrow that is known
To the tear-burdened heart alone;
But now I know its full relief
Through Him who was acquaint with grief;
And peace through every trial flows,
Because I know that Jesus knows."

F.R.H.

"And the Lord said"

"W. Riley, in one of his books, entitled "Gold Chains," has a character, called Susan Smiles, better known as "Grannie." I have pleasure to quote from that book.

"Bill has been telling me about your Jack," Grannie went on when they were comfortably settled and her needles were clicking. "I'm ever so pleased lass. I knew it 'ud come, but I didn't know how soon."

"I hoped it would come," said Amy. "I never got as far as **knowing**. I don't see how you can **know**."

"Eh, lass," said Grannie brightly, "I knew because He told me. I'm not one of them that talks and talks and never waits for an answer. When I've said my say I sit back and listen."

"But you don't hear anything?" said Amy in a puzzled voice.

The old woman laughed quietly. "Don't I?" she answered. "I do that, and you'll never persuade me different. There was a time when I thought same as you think, and then one night when I was reading in the Book my eyes seemed to be fair glued on to four little words – 'and the Lord said.' So I went here and there through the Book, and there it was, **everywhere** – 'and the Lord said.' So I said to myself, 'Susan, the Lord hasn't lost His voice, because He's the same yesterday, today and forever. It's you that doesn't listen,' I says. 'Now next time you've aught to say just give Him a chance to speak back.' and I did. Eh, Lass, we've had some wonderful grand times since then."

"And the Lord said."

PAUL'S SOLEMN CHARGE TO TIMOTHY.

"But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them;

And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:

That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." (2 Timothy 3:14-17)

"And the Lord said."

"Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.

And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgement.

Of sin, because they believe not on me;

Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and you see me no more;

Of judgement, because the prince of this world is judged.

I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.

Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.

He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine and shall shew it unto you.

All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine and shall shew it unto you." (John 16:7-15)

"And the Lord said."

"But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my spirit; and they shall prophesy." (Acts 2:16-18)

"And the Lord said."

"Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.

Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." (Acts 2:36-39)

Selected by Leonard Morgan.

ARE THE LOST REALLY LOST?

Most people in the Church accept the fact that without Jesus, a person is lost in sin and cannot be saved. "After all, the Bible says so in many places. The purpose that Jesus came to the earth and died on the cross was to save the lost, wasn't it?"

Yet most of those same people cannot believe that people who have never heard the gospel of Christ are lost. It might be expressed this way: "They've never had a chance to hear the message of salvation, so they will not be lost – God will not hold them accountable for sin." An example such as a tribe in the deepest part of the Amazon jungle might be given to illustrate people who have never heard the gospel. (Why not in the ghetto of a large city? There are people there who have never heard the gospel; some don't even know who Jesus is.)

Saying that a person cannot be lost until he has had a chance to be saved is like saying, "A man who is overboard in the middle of the ocean cannot drown until he has a chance to be rescued." Yet it's not the life preserver that causes the man to drown, it's the water. In the same way, it's not the gospel that causes a person to be lost; it's sin.

A CONTRADICTION TO THE GREAT COMMISSION

To say people are not lost until they hear the gospel is contradictory to the great commission.

The great commission given by Jesus is recorded in three of the four gospels. In Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus says; ". . . All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." In Mark's account we read, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." In Luke 24:47 it reads, "And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."

There is one large question we need to ask ourselves relative to the great commission: "If people are not lost until they hear the gospel, what is the point of preaching the glad tidings of salvation?" Would it not be cruel to cause people to be lost, who would otherwise be saved if they remained ignorant of the gospel?

The Church in the first century was convinced that sin condemns and only Jesus can save people from their sins. That was the force behind their great evangelistic thrust. When Peter and the rest of the apostles were arrested by the Jewish leaders in Acts 4, Peter was filled with the Holy Ghost and spoke of Jesus when he said: "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved." The apostle Paul stood on Mars hill in Athens and proclaimed the gospel to the Grecian philosophers. He told them, "And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent. Because he hath appointed a day, in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance to all men, in that

he hath raised him from the dead.”

There was some point in time that the Jews had not heard the gospel of Jesus Christ; yet they were told they could not be saved except through Jesus Christ. One might say, “But the Jews were under covenant relationship to God already, and they knew the Messiah was coming, therefore they were lost until they obeyed the gospel.” What about the Gentiles then? They were not under a covenant relationship to God nor were they expecting the Messiah, yet Paul told them to repent because there was coming a judgement. Why would Paul tell them to repent (part of the great commission) if they were not lost, until they heard the gospel?

The apostle Paul writes in Romans 1:20; “For since the creation of the world – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse” (NIV). In other words, when one looks at God’s creation, he can perceive God’s nature: he is good, moral and righteous. This one verse does away with the idea that people have an excuse for not obeying the gospel. Someone may say, “I didn’t know the gospel of Christ,” but the Bible says that he is without excuse.

The Bible tells us that the gospel, “is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Rom 1:16). If people are not lost until they hear the gospel and reject it, then the gospel is not God’s power to save; it is God’s power to condemn. Do you believe that? I pray that you do not believe it.

CONTRARY TO JESUS’ “I AM” STATEMENTS

If I was to say that a person isn’t lost until he has a chance to obey the gospel, I would be saying there are two ways to be saved. (1) A person can be saved outside of Christ and in sin as long as he doesn’t hear the gospel. (2) A person can be saved only through Christ: by the blood that covers sin. Most people would quickly catch the contradiction in that.

The importance of evangelism is seen in the fact that all are lost without Jesus. The reason that Jesus gave the great commission is because he doesn’t desire any to be lost. When we look into the eyes of our neighbour and realize that Jesus died to save him, and without Jesus there is no way for him to be saved, it should compel us to teach him the way of salvation. When we realize that all people without Christ are lost (even in the Amazon), then we will teach and preach worldwide the way the first-century church did. Brethren – *preach the word.*

W.C. DRIVER.

“REDEEMING THE TIME”

“Yesterday is gone forever. Tomorrow never comes. Today is in my hands.” “If I shirk today’s task, I shall be adding to my wasted yesterdays.”

“If I postpone today’s duty, I shall be increasing tomorrow’s burden.”

“If I accomplish what today is set before me, I shall be doing my best to atone for yesterday’s failures, and to prepare for tomorrow’s successes.”

“Therefore, I will endeavor to use my time and opportunities that today shall leave me a little wiser and abler than it found me.” (Author Unknown)

Time is so valuable that we cannot estimate its worth in terms of money. It is certainly too precious to be wasted. The Bible says:

“Wherefore he saith, Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light . . . See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.” (Eph. 5:14-16).

“Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time.” (Col. 4:5).

To waste time is to squander opportunity, and the Bible admonishes us to do good as we have opportunity and emphatically declares that to neglect to so do is to sin.

“And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.” (Gal. 6:9-10).

“Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.” (James 4:17).

It has been well said that, “Some men murder opportunity when they think they are killing time; he who wastes time insults providence.”

Some people say that they do not have enough time to fulfil their spiritual obligations, but we always find the time to do what we want to do more than anything else. Jesus says, **“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness.”** (Matt. 6:33).

What would you do if one of the banks in your town credited your account each morning in the amount of £86,000 on the condition that any balance left at the end of the day would be taken from you forever? If you are a good businessman, you would draw out every penny and invest it wisely. Every morning the Bank of Time credits you with 86,000 seconds. Each day its president (God) rules off as forever lost every second that you have failed to use wisely. Let us redeem the time by doing good. Let us remember that in the parable of the unprofitable servant his master said concerning him, **“And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”** (Matt. 25:30).

“Look to this day, – For it is the very life of life.

In its brief course lie all the verities and realities of your existence:

The glory of action, – The bliss of growth,

The splendour of beauty, – For yesterday is but a dream and tomorrow is only a vision;

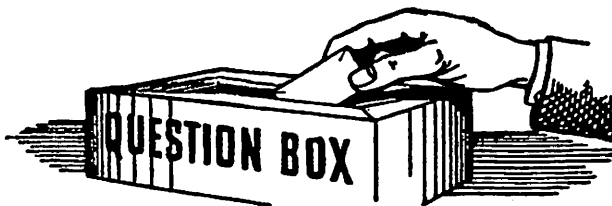
But today well lived makes every yesterday a dream of happiness, and every tomorrow a vision of hope. – Look well, therefore, to this day.”

G.F. RAINES

Today, alone, you call your own – To do with as you will; Don't count upon tomorrow, friend . . . The hands may then be still!

QUESTION BOX

Br. Marsden is ill at present: until his recovery we will print a previous article.



Conducted by
Alf Marsden

“I have often heard it said that the Church of Christ is too exclusive. Would you give me your views on this because it troubles me when I hear people talk like this.”

Let us be absolutely clear on one thing, and let us state it with all the vigour we can to other people; the Church of Christ excludes no one. How can the Church exclude people when Christ its Head, stated, “For God so loved the world that he

gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him" (John 3:16,17 N.I.V.) (The reader will understand, of course, that 'the world' means the people in it). The plain and unmistakeable message of the Bible is that **anyone** who comes to God in faith and obedience to His Christ can be a partaker of the grace of God. So taking the above into account we can be sure that neither God nor Christ would exclude anyone from salvation, and as the Church is the body of Christ then it has no right to exclude people if He **includes** them. But this statement needs some clarification so that we shall not misunderstand the answer to this important and serious question.

INVITATIONS

The verb 'to invite' means 'to request courteously to come.' Invitations come to us in several ways.

We may be invited to a wedding or some other function. The invitation usually specifies by **name** who is to attend. Therefore, anyone so invited is included: conversely, anyone who is not invited by name is excluded. It follows, of course, that any one who is invited by name has the right to refuse the invitation. The invitation to salvation given by God is **not** of this nature: if it were, then God would have to choose who should be saved. This He does not do.

Then there is the invitation to apply for a job: this invitation usually comes via newspapers and other agencies. This type of invitation is normally accompanied by requirements of academic qualifications or skills levels on the part of the applicant, and so excludes all others who do not possess such qualifications or skills. God's invitation is not like **this**, although, as we shall see, He **does** make certain requirements of us in His Word, the Bible. But sufficient to say, **anyone**, even those who consider themselves to be the deepest-dyed sinners may respond to the invitation: it is the nature of the response which is important.

There is also the **general** invitation: this is to all who want to respond to it. In theory, this type of invitation is not exclusive: in practice, it is. There will be many who will never hear of the invitation and so will be excluded. There will be many who will ignore it, and so will be excluded. There will be many who will want to respond but will not want to fulfil any requirements: they will want to try some other way, and in so doing they will **hope** that they will not be excluded. It seems to me that this is the way that God's invitation through the Gospel is received by people. He wants to include all, and so makes a general invitation through the Word: it is we, the invited, by our refusal to accept who make God's Will exclusive.

EXCLUSIONS

We know that the verb 'to exclude' means 'to shut out from.' We also know that it is not the intention of God to exclude anyone, therefore, we ask ourselves, "who does the excluding?" The short answer is, of course, we ourselves.

One of the ways in which we exclude ourselves is by not being ready. You remember the parable of the ten virgins who were waiting for the coming of the bridegroom. All of them knew that it was the custom at Jewish weddings for the bridegroom to tarry for a long period of time before he came to the wedding ceremony, but they didn't know the precise time that he would appear. The foolish virgins were wrong on two accounts; they hadn't taken sufficient oil for the lengthy wait, and consequently they were totally unprepared when the time came. The door was shut against them. Who was responsible for their exclusion? Was it the one who shut the door? No, because they weren't there ready to enter while the door was open. Was it the wise virgins? No, they had prepared for **themselves** and that was all they could do. Was it the foolish virgins themselves? Yes, by their state of unreadiness they had

excluded themselves. The message is clear. The Lord is coming again. It will be our fault if we are not ready to meet Him (see Matt. 25:1-13).

Another way to exclude ourselves is by relying on our own standard of righteousness. We think that our own way is best. The Scribes and Pharisees thought that way as well, but Jesus taught His disciples "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of Heaven" (Matt. 5:20). The Apostle Paul in his letter to Rome said, "There is none righteous, no, not one" (Rom. 3:10). How do we, then, learn of the righteousness that God will accept? Listen to Paul again, "But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets. Even the righteousness of God which is by faith in Jesus Christ unto all and upon all that believe: for there is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:21-23). So if we rely on our own righteousness to get us to Heaven, and we are excluded because of that, who is to blame? We are!

One of the surest ways to exclude ourselves is by maintaining a stubborn will in spite of the pleadings of God for us to yield. Matthew records that Jesus sadly looked out on Jerusalem and said, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them which 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" (Matt. 23:37,38). Here we see the Saviour yearning to save the lost. All they have to do is come to him in faith and obedience, and yet their stubborn wills hold them back. Is it any different in the twentieth century? What chilling words the Saviour had to utter out of a heart filled with love and pain, "Behold your house is left unto you desolate." Who does the excluding in this respect? We do!

We could go on giving example after example but I feel sure the point is made quite clearly.

LET GOD BE TRUE

Paul in his letter to Rome says, "For what if some did not believe? shall their belief make the faith of God without effect? God forbid: yes, let God be true, but every man a liar" (Rom. 3:3,4)

I get rather impatient with people, Christians included, who blame God and the Church for everything which goes wrong. It seems to me that the world is waging a relentless war against God, and tragically, people who should know better are assisting in this war. But I ask you to look around. Does the escalation of violence, drug abuse, sexual abuse, pornography, and a general feeling of helplessness make you believe that peace, and truth, and hope are by-products of the world? Or is it rather that the much-maligned call of God through the gospel of Jesus Christ is the only effective answer? But you may say to me, "Even so, there is much that is good in the world." Well, of course there is, but it is only in so far as society has appreciated the love and compassion as revealed by God and manifested in His Christ that this is so. How can a world that is lost in sin produce qualities like that?

Therefore, let God be true. Let us determine not to exclude ourselves from His grace, but let us believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, confess Him before the world, be truly repentant of our sinful state, and be immersed in water into His name. Then the burden of sin will be lifted: then we shall know that God is really true, and that any man who tells us otherwise is a liar. Above all, never, never say that God or the Church excludes anyone. Let us put the blame for being out of fellowship with Him squarely where it lies. With ourselves!

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

HINDRANCE TO PRAYER

Of all the dynamics for the Christian's life, prayer surely must head the list. It's an humbling fact when the redeemed sinner realizes that he can now, through Christ, come boldly before the throne of God and obtain help in time of need (Heb. 4:16). How strengthening is the promise of Jesus which states: "Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do; that the Father may be glorified" (John 14:13,14). John said, "This is the confidence that we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us, and if we know that he hears us whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions which we have asked of him" (1 John 5:14,15).

Not only does the Bible point out the great possibilities of prayer, it also states that one's prayers may be hindered. Answer to prayers require more than a mere uttering of the petition. The following things are hindrances to effectual prayer.

First, harbouring a secret sin in your heart will cut off communication with God. The Psalmist said, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me" (Psa. 66:18). Be sure that your own soul is cleansed from secret sin before you pray, Remember the all-seeing, "searching eyes of the Lord" (2 Chron. 16:9).

Second, unbelief will hinder your prayer life. When we pray to the Father, we must believe that He is "able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us" (Eph. 3:20) James tells the doubting man that he will not receive anything of the Lord (James 1:6,7).

Third, selfishness will assure no results from prayer. James said, "Ye ask and receive not because ye ask amiss: that ye might use it for your own pleasures" (James 4:3). We must not seek to honour and exalt ourselves, or ask God to assist us in sinful pleasures.

Fourth, an unforgiving spirit will hinder your prayers. Jesus said, "And whosoever ye stand praying, forgive, if you have aught against anyone; that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses" (Mark 11:25). Do not pray if you are harbouring a grudge against a person. We must forgive others (Col. 3:13).

Fifth, a lack of patience may cause failure in your prayer life. As we live in our "instant age" we have come to expect God to answer our prayers instantly. If He does not answer after a couple of times, we become impatient and give up. Elijah's prayer on Mt. Carmel was answered because he was persistent. The widow continually besought the unjust judge for help; finally, he did. Jesus said, "Shall not God avenge his own which cry day and night unto him, though he bore long with them?" (Luke 18:1-7). The answer is, "Yes He will!"

Sixth, formalism can hinder our prayers. We must not be concerned with how men view our prayers, or fall into the trap of vain repetitions. This was the problem of the Pharisees: Jesus condemned them for such actions. (Luke 18:9-14). We must be careful, also, to avoid heartless flippancy in our prayers.

If your prayers are not being answered, or at least you think they are not, maybe you have one or more of these hindrances in your prayer life. Let us cleanse our hearts and "ask in faith, nothing wavering" (James 1:5,6). God still answers prayers, but only on His conditions.

J.J. TURNER.

READING THE BIBLE

WHO that ever read the tale of the Prodigal Son failed to remember it?

No literature, no book was ever so well-knit as the New Testament, no library

richer than the Bible. Fine literature it may be, but this goes for nothing if we do not make it so by fair reading. It is a sober fact that not only the Church but civilisation is built upon it. "Reading maketh a full man." Shall we be content with a Sunday ration? No feast is richer than the Bible.

“OUR MARRIAGE RELATIONSHIP TO CHRIST”

The Holy Spirit, through Paul says of the Church, **“I am jealous over you with Godly Jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband”** (the reason?) **“that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ”**. (II Cor. 11:2).

We understand marriage in the social, physical, intellectual and emotional realm. We see some happy marriages, some unhappy, some broken, some a tragic battleground. Yet even in this we know the ideal marriage . . . **LOVING, STEADY, SUPPORTIVE PERMANENT, DYNAMIC AND GROWING.**

In the opening paragraph we read a Christian has a relationship to Christ that is like marriage: close, pure, loving, lasting, exciting, stimulating and maturing. Yet, even as Satan beguiled Eve, we can be corrupted and lose the purity of our relationship to Christ. We have this one superior relationship that we can unintentionally or deliberately lose. The “oneness” is like that spoken about in Ephesians 4: 1-4.

In Romans 7: 3-4 the Holy Spirit confirms this marriage to Christ so that we may bring fruit to God. In human marriage it is imperative that the wife gives pre-eminence to her husband. Similarly, we Christians **MUST** give pre-eminence at all times, under all circumstances, to Christ our Lord (Col. 1:6). We give Him the honour due to Him by worshipping, in giving (I Cor. 16: 1-2, II Cor. 9: 6-7) in singing His praise (Col. 3: 16,17) in observing the Lord’s supper (I Cor. 11:23, Luke 22:19) and by contending for the faith, (Jude 3).

In human marriage respect is shown by treating one another with love and concern, in functioning in proper roles and in submission. In Ephesians 5: 22-32 God commands man to love his wife and the wife to submit to the husband. If we can show respect to our **earthly companions**, how much more is due to our Heavenly companion? The marriage-supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:7) is for those who are ready, pure, clean, prepared and willing. The Church is made up of those who come to Christ on His terms – and love, cherish, respect and honour Him (John 14:15).

These are the invited participants to the marriage-supper. As Christians we must not compromise in our relationship (Gal. 1:6-9) so that we can be found ready (Matthew 25: 1-13). **WE** can show disrespect to our heavenly companion by staying away from gatherings (Hebrews 10: 24-25), by an unforgiving attitude (Eph. 4:32, Matt. 6:12) by being lazy (I Cor. 3:9, Eph. 4:3, II Thess. 3:12) and by refusing to teach others (Matt. 28: 18-20). Departing from our marriage companion and relationship, (whether our earthly marriage or our heavenly one) is adultery. We **DO** not have the right to leave Him. A Spiritual divorce from Christ will lead to condemnation. We entered a life-time contract at our immersion into Christ, and being espoused to Him we must remain faithful unto death. And may our marriage to Him be a happy one.

Written by T. W. HARTLE, (Evangelist)
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SCRIPTURE READINGS

June 5	Psalm 109:1-15	Acts 1
June 12	Joel 2:18-32	Acts 2:1-21
June 19	Psalm 16	Acts 2:22-47
June 26	Deut. 18:9-22	Acts 3

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

AUTHOR: Luke, the beloved physician, and the writer of the gospel record that bears his name. Luke was a companion of the apostle Paul and features in this book.

TO WHOM ADDRESSED:

Theophilus, who is described as “most excellent Theophilus” in the introduction to Luke’s gospel. He was probably a ruler of a Greek city-state.

DATE: uncertain, but possibly mid-60’s A.D.

PLACE: unknown, but possibly Rome after Paul’s imprisonment.

MAIN THEME: “The history of the development of the early Church, from the ascension of Christ to Paul’s imprisonment at Rome, and the opening of his ministry there. Many Bible students see in the book the formal beginning of the age of the Holy Spirit” (Thompson’s Chain Reference Bible).

CHAPTER 1

We read in this chapter of Jesus’ ascension to heaven. It occurred forty days after His resurrection from the dead. In this period He had taught His apostles about the kingdom of God. Also, “**He showed Himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that He was alive**” (1:3, N.I.V.). Returning to heaven, Jesus was then able to send the Holy Spirit, who was to endow them with power to enable them to be His witnesses “**in Jerusalem, in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth**” (1:8). We read of the promise of the Spirit in John’s gospel record. “**And I will pray the Father and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever;**

even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive because it sees Him not, neither knows Him: but you know Him; for He dwells with you and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you” (14:16-18). So Jesus left and the Spirit came. The Spirit has been dwelling in faithful disciples ever since.

The apostles and others gathered in Jerusalem after the great event of Jesus’ ascension. They had been told that “**this same Jesus, who is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as you have seen Him go into heaven**” (1:11). In Jerusalem the apostles appointed a replacement for the traitor Judas Iscariot, who had hanged himself. The man was named Matthias, like Justus, a witness of the Master’s resurrection (1:22). The use of lots (1:20) might seem strange to us today, but was quite common at that time.

CHAPTER 2

Chapter two features Peter’s first gospel address. His hearers were his fellow Jews. It is no surprise to read of Peter on this occasion as we recall Jesus’ words: “**And I will give unto you (Peter) the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven**” (Matthew 16:19).

Paul later wrote that the gospel is for the Jew first and then the Gentile (Romans 1:16). The Jews then dwelling in Jerusalem had come from many parts of the then-known world (2:9-11). They, of course, spoke many languages in addition to Hebrew and the phenomenon of glossolalia had amazed them.

The object of Peter’s address was to show that Jesus of Nazareth was the promised Messiah, the Son of the living God (2:36). To prove his argument, he quoted from various passages of the Old Testament scriptures (Joel 2:28-32; Psalm 16:8-11; Psalm 110:1). The passage from Joel prophesied the outpour-

ing of the Holy Spirit before the coming of that great and terrible day. Personally, I believe this day to be the day of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman forces in A.D. 70.

The resurrection of Jesus from the dead was a fact very much emphasised by Peter on this occasion. He said: **"This Jesus has God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses"** (2:32). In contrast, the great king David, whom they revered, was dead and remained so. After all, his selpuchre could still be seen in the city. But David had prophesied of the resurrection of the Messiah in his psalms and the man from Nazareth had fulfilled these prophecies. Jesus was, therefore, greater than David.

When they had realised they had killed the promised Messiah they cried out to Peter and the rest of the apostles: **"Men and Brethren what shall we do?"** The response came: **"Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit"** (2:38). I know a lot of so-called Christians who cannot repeat these words of Peter in circumstances of a sinner asking what he has to do to be saved. My contention is that what was good enough for Peter should be good enough for us. After all, he was an inspired apostle!

Another contention of mine is this: Peter here preached the first gospel message. He preached it in its entirety. Nothing has been added to it since. The message that saved the three thousand on the day of Pentecost is the same message that saves sinners today. Jesus, of course, is at the heart of the message. Indeed, in many ways, He is the gospel: because without Jesus we have no gospel.

CHAPTER 3

The healing of the lame man in the name of Jesus by Peter showed to the people that Peter and John were genuine servants of Jehovah. We read: **"And he**

(Peter) took him by the right hand and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength" (3:7). "Ankle-bones" is from the the Greek *sphuron* or *sphudron* (from *sphura*, a hammer, owing to a resemblance in the shape). It is a medical term, which would be used only by a trained doctor, which, of course, Luke was.

Peter's address recorded for us in chapter three has tended not to enjoy the same attention as the one in chapter two. But it was a telling message once again. Acts 2:38 ties in with Acts 3:19. The terminology is different, but there are close similarities.

I like some of the titles Peter gives to Jesus here: "Holy One", "Just" and "Prince of Life" (3:14,15). A good study for disciples is to write down all the titles given to Jesus in the Scriptures. There are quite a number for our consideration and meditation.

Moses had prophesied of the coming of a great prophet: **"A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me: Him shall you hear in all things whatsoever He shall say unto you"** (Deuteronomy 18:15). This is quoted by Peter (3:22). The consequences of not hearing Him are unthinkable (3:23). The risen Jesus is that prophet – the greatest of all.

It is interesting to reflect that the book of Acts follows the four gospel records – books of facts. Acts should always follow facts. In Christianity people **have to do something**. There has to be a response to the grace of God. It behoves everyone to study carefully every example of conversion in this book and see exactly what is required. Remember, dear reader, eternal life is in the question and joy through eternity.

IAN S. DAVIDSON,
Motherwell.

The devil does not tempt people whom he finds suitably employed.

COMING EVENTS

FELLOWSHIP WEEKEND

Longshoot, Wigan

27th - 30th May, 1994

Theme: "God's Glorious Plan
For The Fulness of Time"

The 1992 Week-End was enjoyed by all and it is expected that the coming Fellowship Week-end will be even better.

Accommodation is on a first-come-first-served basis so early booking is advised.

Contact either:

D. Melling on (0942) 204744 or

R. Marsden on (0942) 207953.

D. MELLING.

ANNUAL SOCIAL

BUCKIE

Saturday, 7th May, 1994

3.30 p.m.

Speaker: David Murray

All Welcome

BEGINNING TO SEE THE LIGHT

It was reported in the "Daily Record" of 6th September, 1991, that the Rev. Sandy Shaw had been banned from the pulpit of his congregation by the Church of Scotland (Presbyterian) for refusing to 'baptise' any more babies.

Mr. Shaw believes that no one should be baptised "until they are old enough to repent and believe in God". The Church of Scotland have suspended him from office because he has "broken his ministerial vows" and he will almost certainly lose his job. He is expecting to be sacked and hopes to join a church believing what he does. Certainly in 1981 when a Church of Scotland 'minister' the Rev. Riach, came to the conclusion that baptism was immersion, and acted upon that by getting one of his elders to immerse him in the sea, he was later excommunicated from the Church.

The 'Rev'. Shaw says that he is very disappointed at his plight but, having wrestled with his conscience on the issue for 22 years is resolved never to sprinkle another baby. He also says that he is not alone in his views in the Church of Scotland and knows of at least another 17 churchmen who share his opinions: and there is at least one in every Presbytery.

JUVENILE DELINQUENCY

There is no such thing as a juvenile problem as a thing apart. Children and adolescents are not a factor, but a product; not the actors, but the acted-upon. Youth is a perfect community thermometer, or an organ upon which the community plays for harmony or discord; or a mirror which reflects the home, school, church and picture-show.

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