

The SCRIPTURE STANDARD

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

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IF THE LORD WILLS

The question of "God's Will" comes up in the newspapers this morning. This question comes up from time to time, and we have certainly dealt with it in the past. This time, it is occasioned by the birth, a few weeks ago, of Siamese Twins in St. Mary's Hospital, in Manchester. The R.C. parents, having had prior warning, arrived here from a remote Mediterranean island because of the medical facilities here. The twins are joined at the abdomen and share one heart and one pair of lungs. A judge in the High Court has ruled that the twins should be separated albeit one will die. Without the separation both will die in an estimated three months or so. The parents have appealed against the judge's decision, and are strongly against the separation on the grounds that the whole business is "God's Will." Our hearts go out to the parents in such a dire situation, and we also sympathise with the judge and his responsibility. There was another judge, in the O.T., who once gave a similar decision: i.e. the dividing of a child into two parts.

There are, of course, a great number of unknown quantities in the vagaries of *Mother Nature*, and much too deep and mysterious for us to comprehend, but I very much doubt if Siamese twins have anything to do with God's will. It is true that God has used diseases, plagues, blights, famines and earthquakes etc. in the past to chastise a wicked and stubborn humanity, but I would question whether this was what God ever wanted, and could be described as God's will. Jesus had nothing but compassion for the sick and deformed, and went about Galilee "healing all manner of disease among the people" so much so that all the sick in Syria converged upon Him "with divers diseases, torments, those possessed of demons, those lunatic and the palsied, and Jesus healed them all" (Matt. 4.23). If all those maladies were "God's will" then surely Jesus was opposing God's will by healing those people. If Jesus deplored the sick-bed and saw a need to cure diseases and suffering, it is difficult to imagine that such suffering was "His will" in the first place. We do not have the Great Physician here today and lesser physicians must do what they can, and cope with whatever nature throws up. To try and separate Siamese twins (albeit a great risk to both parties) must surely be a humane action, and not a defiance of God's will. Aiding the sick and suffering is surely a "good work" in the N.T. and not a challenge to God. (In any case much of our illness and disease is self-induced by our life-style, and much deformity at birth is due to pollution and our use of chemicals in industry: hence nothing whatever to do with God's will).

However, the twins' parents, backed by the R.C. Church, think that both twins should be allowed to die, rather than that one twin should survive, and insist that only

this would be in keeping with the will of God. The case is causing great interest in this country (as to what, exactly, is God's will) and also much legal controversy and debate. How would we define or describe "God's will."

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 also presides over 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 what 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 study, be identified: 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, we 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 agley."

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 wills"**. 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.

ASSEMBLY-LINE CHRISTIANS

One of the most inspiring accounts of conversion in the New Testament is the teaching and baptizing of the Ethiopian Eunuch by Philip. The book of Acts reveals that after his baptism **"he went on his way rejoicing"** (8:39). Why all this rejoicing? His sins were forgiven and he was a free man in Christ! He was on his way back home with the Good News of Christ.

I have often wondered what it must have been like when the Eunuch reached his homeland and began to share the news of his conversion. How was he able to make it as a one-of-a-kind person in a "hostile" environment? How was he able to grow without a spiritual straightjacket being placed upon him by the brethren to keep him on the "straight and narrow?" How could he have succeeded without proper regimentation of his daily life and the practice of a checklist religion?

Becoming a Christian means that a new relationship has been established between God and man. The child of God has become a new creature in Christ; he is a disciple (learner) who is in the process of developing his unique abilities in Christ. This, according to the Hebrew writer, takes time. New Christians, according to Peter, are **"babes in Christ,"** and need a special diet and care from the mature members of the Body.

Just as in physical growth, there are no shortcuts to spiritual maturity, as some of our brethren are trying to bring about in some congregations. In fact, to hear some talk, and read their writings, you are led to believe that producing mature Christians is possible through an assembly-line approach in discipling: i.e. put every new Christian through the same programme, demanding identical activities from each one, etc., and you have a sure method for the new convert to grow by.

THE STRAIGHTJACKET APPROACH

I believe the assembly-line approach to making disciples is contrary to the tenor of the New Testament's teaching on Christian growth. Such an approach sets up unnecessary hurdles for the new Christian to "jump." In some cases it is no more than just another form of legalism, which can squeeze the very joy and individuality out of the Christian life. Any system that produces one standard model of "good, orthodox, properly behaving, do the same thing, only way to please God" approach to Christian growth, is not a position that is in harmony with the New Testament Epistles.

The straightjacket approach to Christian living is not biblical. Definite boundaries are placed on one's life by the Scriptures, but, within the limits, the Christian has the latitude to grow and develop his own uniqueness. No one has a right to bind upon God's servants any other approach to living.

The assembly-line approach to Christian growth denies the possibilities Jesus spoke about, when He said: **"I have many things to say unto you, but you cannot bear them now."** Some brethren teach today that a new converts must be ready to do everything they are told to do; there is no room for growth or better understanding. If you are converted, you must do it now.

The assembly-line approach to growth makes a **workaholic** out of the child of God who is dead to the law by the Body of Christ. He is placed into a system which demands that he do a "101" things in order to prove his faithfulness to the Lord. If he ever finds himself with any free time on his hands, he feels guilty. He must always be moving and doing. He dare not try to follow the example of Jesus and the disciples in Mark 6:31, where Jesus said, **". . . come away yourselves . . . and rest a while."** A workaholic is in bondage. He works out of duty instead of joy and love. He always wonders if he is doing enough to maintain God's favour.

THE SLEDGE-HAMMER APPROACH

Another problem I see with the assembly-line method of so-called spiritual growth, is the over-emphasis it places on intellectualism. It leaves the impression that the one who knows the most is the most spiritual. This is the same problem the Gnostics had, as they sought to encourage others on to a "higher knowledge" which would bring salvation. Bible doctrine is essential for growth, but its meaning becomes real in the life of a Christian, as he **"studies to show himself approved unto God,"** and prayerfully applies it to his life as a "doer of the word." Growth in knowledge does not signify maturity in and of itself; maturity comes when your faith is tested and you pass the test through the power gained from God's word. As a doer of the word I have as much right to determine how I will use it in my life as anyone else. And who is to say that my application, to my unique situation, isn't the right one?

Any approach to Bible study, and application of the truths gained, that uses it as a sledge hammer to beat others into conformity is wrong. A good example of this is how some use Romans 14:21: **"It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak."** This verse is used to goad new Christians into conformity. They are told that they must attend . . . ; or not to do this; be sure to take time for this; don't wear this, etc., because if they fail it may offend a weaker brother. When you take time to check on who is really offended, it is not the weaker brother but the stronger brother who is offended and raises objections. And on it goes!

ROOM AND TIME TO GROW

James reminds us of the wrong of trying to judge and censor one another in the church. **"There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and destroy: who are thou that judgest another?"** When a brother seeks to impose a list of "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not" upon another, that are not contained in the Biblical text, he is in serious

trouble with God. It is wrong to reject the commandments of God in order to keep your own traditions. The Lord has not called us to produce spiritual job descriptions for one another so that we will be able to know when to pray, study, visit, etc. All of these things are good and will probably be present in one form or another in every Christian's life as he grows in Christ; they emerge slowly through maturity and should not be imposed artificially.

The answer to the assembly-line approach to discipleship is elders and evangelists doing the work assigned to them by God. As these men follow the Bible as well as show by their lifestyle, new Christians will be led into the "fullness of Christ." There are no shortcuts. It takes time! If you doubt this statement, take your Bible and read the accounts of how long and hard it was for men like Peter to mature in Christ. Let's be patient with God's children!

J. TURNER.

FORMULA FOR MATURITY

One great problem within the Church is a lack of maturity. We see it all around us. We struggle a great deal with it ourselves. We see churches split because of immaturity. We see fellowship problems within a congregation because of the immature conduct of its members. We see many fall away from Christ because they did not mature with time. We have problems putting men in leadership positions because we cannot find any mature enough in the faith to fill the positions. The Church struggles because of immaturity. What a difference a few good mature men would make in every congregation! We want it; wish for it, we dream about it; . . .

How do we mature? In our own personal struggle for maturity what are the ingredients that will lead us to greater maturity? Peter offers a formula in 1 Peter 2:2: **"Like new-born babes, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up to salvation."** Within this verse is a formula for maturity: God's Word + attitude = maturity.

GOD'S WORD

Peter says we should long for **"the pure spiritual milk."** If one backs up into chapter 1 and reads verses 22 - 2:3, it becomes clear that the pure spiritual milk is symbolic of God's Word. If we are to grow up to salvation we must long for God's Word. It is the Word that will bring about our maturing.

There is no way one can mature apart from a fervent study of God's Word. We all know this from our own personal lives. We see it in the lives of others. Those who drift away from Christ, split churches, or who are constantly quarrelling with others are those who have no knowledge of God's Word. Hosea said, **"My people are destroyed for a lack of knowledge . . ."** (4:6). His words aptly describe what happens when one does not daily read and study God's Word. There can be no maturing in the faith without a study of that which produces faith. **"Faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ"** (Romans 10:17).

The writer of Hebrews discusses the place of God's Word in the maturing process. In Hebrews 5:12 he writes, **"For though by this time you ought to be teachers you need someone to teach you again the first principles of God's Word."** Notice their immaturity was due to not even knowing the *first principles of God's Word*. He goes on to explain they needed milk, the milk of God's Word. Only by growing on the milk would they later be ready for the solid food of God's Word. Solid food "is for the mature" he says in verse 14. God's Word is what produces and maintains maturity.

Possibly the number one reason for immaturity in the Church is a lack of a fervent study of God's Word. It takes a daily dedication of study to produce maturity of faith.

There's no way anyone can mature if he denies himself that which maturity is made of, God's Word.

ATTITUDE

It is also important to focus on Peter's words "*long for*." God's Word in itself will not lead one to maturity. Peter speaks of a "longing for." These words indicate an attitude. Our study of the word must be with the right attitude, an attitude of longing.

"Like an newborn babe" expresses well the meaning of longing for. All of us have seen the impatience of a hungry baby when his milk is just a few minutes late. Many of us are not much better when our dinner is late. I'm reminded of the TV commercial with the roaring lions and tigers pacing back and forth as the zoo keeper is late with dinner. Of course, what the keeper needs is a certain kind of watch. When one is hungry there is a "longing for" food. Jesus described this longing as a "hungering and thirsting after righteousness." This is a vital part in our study of God's word, as vital as the word itself.

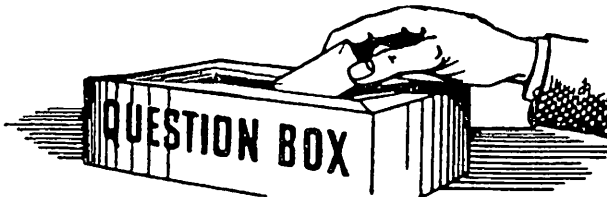
To illustrate this, two people of equal ability could daily study God's Word for thirty minutes. One does it out of compulsion, habit, competition with others in the congregation, or whatever reason. The other does it because he hungers and thirsts after it. After a year, five years, ten years, a life-time, the one who studied out of a longing for will be the more mature Christian. Have you studied and studied and not experienced the growth and maturity you want or see in others? Perhaps the problem is one of the heart, one of attitude?

FORMULA

God's Word plus Attitude equals Maturity.

Both elements are essential to maturity. One who studies and yet does not have the right attitude will find maturity evasive. Those with the right attitude and yet neglecting the daily study of God's Word will also find maturity evasive. The Church is full of both kinds of Christians. Those with good attitudes and good intentions and yet neglect the daily study of the Bible. And, those who have committed themselves to a routine study and even memorising the Bible, yet their attitude does not allow them to live what they come to know intellectually. *The mature Christian is truly rare.* The one with love of God in his heart that he studies daily God's Will, and the attitude to put into practice the things he comes to know, he will reach maturity.

C. YOUNG.



Conducted by
Frank Worgan

“*“The earth abideth for ever.” What does this mean?”*

The passage referred to is Ecclesiastes 1:4, and the phrase which I have no doubt prompted the question is, '*abideth for ever.*' If we are to understand this expression it is important that we read the entire verse.

"*One generation goeth and another generation cometh: and the earth abideth for ever*" (English RV).

"*A generation goes and a generation comes, but the earth remains for ever.*" (RSV).

I think that most readers of the "S.S." will be aware of the fact that this is a verse to which such people as the so-called and self-named '*Jehovah's Witnesses*' turn, when they look for support for their theory concerning the future of the present earth.

In the first volume of his six-volume series which he entitled '*Studies in the Scriptures*,' and first published in 1886, Charles T. Russell, the father of what has become the present-day 'Watchtower' organisation, sowed the seed of the erroneous doctrine which declares that this present earth will not be destroyed, but will '*abide for ever*,' because it will be renovated and prepared for use as the paradise home of those who accept their 'Kingdom' message.

It matters not to the disciples of the "Watchtower" organisation that 2nd Peter 3:7 states plainly that,

"the heavens and earth that now exist have been stored up for fire, being kept until the day of Judgment and destruction of ungodly men."

Verse 10 of the chapter states, *"the elements will be dissolved with fire and the earth and the works that are upon it shall be burned up."*

Verse 13 states, *"According to His promise we wait for new heavens and new earth in which righteousness dwells."*

Or, that Rev. 21:1 reads, *"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away . . ."*

Bear in mind that the expression "*the first heaven*" does not relate to the dwelling place of God. It is the description, well understood in those days, of the sky which we see above us.

The dwelling place of God was described as '*the third heaven*,' as in 2 Cor. 12:2, or '*the heaven of heavens*,' in 2nd Chron. 6:18. Modern versions render this, '*The highest heaven*.'

The followers of the Russell doctrine refuse to take these verses literally, because Russell taught them that here the word 'earth' '*symbolises human government and social arrangements*,' (Studies in the Scripture, vol. 1, p.69).

Now, not only is this in direct conflict with what Peter tells us earlier, in 2nd Peter 3, it is a quite deliberate falsification of what the scriptures teach, perpetrated in order to establish a false doctrine.

Please look at verse 6 in that chapter. Notice the different Greek words, which are used.

We are told that in the days of Noah the '*world*' - (i.e., tge '*kosmos*,' the world system and its life) - perished. But, states Peter, the '*earth*' - (i.e. the '*ge*,' the physical planet itself) and everything on it will be burned up, with the very elements dissolving with fire.

The Contrast between Man and his planet.

When Ecclesiastes 1:4 is dragged in to support the present-day "Watchtower" error, the clear and simple significance of the verse is missed. In it, the biblical writer declares that life on the earth is transient and full of change. Even in the world of nature there is constant movement and constant change, but there is no lasting progress.

As for Man, although he labours constantly neither he nor his works endure. But whilst one human generation follows another - (such is the brevity of Man's existence) - the earth itself remains. And it remains '*for ever*.' But the word '*olam*' does not mean '*eternally*.' It means '*age-lasting*.'

The earth will continue until the role designed for it in the plan of God has been fulfilled.

'For ever - Exodus 21:6

To understand the meaning of the phrase "*for ever*," turn to Exodus 21:6, where the same Hebrew word '*olam*' is used.

This verse gives us the illustration of the treatment of a slave who, having served his master for six years, had the right to claim his freedom when the seventh year, the Year of Jubilee, came around.

According to the Law, no slave could be held for more than six years, except by his own agreement. Hence, if the slave chose, for whatever reason, not to claim the freedom to which the Law gave him a right, but expressed his wish to remain with his master, a ceremony described as *'the opening of the ear'* must take place. This is the custom described in Exodus 21:6. After his ear had been bored with an awl, the slave must serve his master *'for ever.'*

It goes without saying that this does not mean *'for ever and ever,'* or *'eternally,'* as that expression is used in Exodus 15:18 in relation to God's reign. It means that the slave must serve his master for the rest of his natural life; in other words, as long as he lives.

In Eccles. 1:4 the phrase *'for ever'* is used in a similar way. The existence of the present earth, also, will continue for just as long as the will and purpose of God decrees, and the scriptures make it abundantly plain that this means it will continue until Christ returns. Compare 2nd Thess. 1:7-10 with 2nd Peter 3:10 and 13. These verses describe the end of this present age and this present earth.

A Ridiculous Doctrine

'Pastor' Russell died on a train, in 1916 and was succeeded to the leadership of the movement by J. J. Rutherford, a man who was capable of making statements as outrageous as those of Russell himself and whose flight of fantasy reached the heights of the absurd when, on Feb. 24th 1918, at Los Angeles, California, he preached a sermon which declared that, *'The World Has Ended - Millions Now Living Will Never Die.'*

This was to become the sub-title of a Book which set out the same notion, and the central theme of a campaign, which ran from 1918 to 1923. According to this theory, the earth would never pass away, in the sense of being destroyed, but would be 'renovated' and 'cleansed,' and this 'new' earth would become a paradise. This was the view of the 'new' earth, held by both Russell and Rutherford. What is more, Rutherford claimed that those who had suffered most in the recent (1914-1918) war, would be *'the first to enjoy the blessings of the new age.'*

Those who had lost their sight would see again, and those who had lost limbs would grow new ones!

And, of course! Millions alive at that time would never die!

I wonder how many of those who were alive when this ludicrous doctrine was proclaimed, are still walking around to day?

The name 'Jehovah's Witnesses'

Incidentally, if you wonder why I have used such expressions as *'the followers of Russell'* and *'Russellites,'* instead of calling them *'Jehovah's Witnesses,'* the reason is that when this theory was first propagated those who accepted it were Russell's disciples. The name *'Jehovah's Witnesses'* is the latest of a variety of names by which they became known. It was adopted at a Convention held in Columbus, Ohio, August 24-30, 1931, at the instigation of J. J. Rutherford, in an endeavour to eliminate the class-system which Russell had developed among his followers.

Those present at that Convention were informed that 'new light' had been received on the parable of Jesus in Matt. 20: 1-16. The new interpretation said that eleven hours of the day during which the labourers were sent out to work in the vineyard, were the eleven years from 1920 to 1931, and the one-penny reward they *all* received was the new name *'Jehovah's Witness.'*

Questions to Frank Worgan, 5 Gryfebank Way, Houston,
Renfrewshire, PA6 7NZ, Scotland.

(Frank is to undergo heart bye-pass surgery next week, but hopes to resume "QB" as soon as possible. We wish him well and will remember him in our prayers. Ed.)

FORGIVE

It sometimes seems that one of the most difficult abilities for Christians to acquire is that of forgiving brethren who 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.

BLESSED ARE THE MEEK

Jesus said in Matthew 5:5 "*Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.*" "*Meekness*" is difficult to understand due to current usage of the word in our society. It is usually equated with weakness, indolence, peace at any price, indifference and spineless gentleness. None of these is characteristic of being meek.

God's people are told in Zephaniah 2:3 to "*seek righteousness, seek meekness.*" Titus was to show meekness towards all men (Titus 3:2). Meekness is a fruit of the spirit in Galatians 5:23. It is with meekness that we are to receive the engrafted word which is able to save our soul (James 1:21). We are to answer those that ask us of our salvation with meekness and fear (1 Peter 3:15). A woman is to have a meek and quiet spirit (1 Peter 3:4). When we approach the erring we are to do so in a spirit of meekness considering thyself lest we also be tempted (Galatians 6:1).

Meekness is opposed to arrogance. It is not meanness, nor a surrender of our rights nor cowardice. It is mild, gentle, patient, not rushed or implacable. Implacable is "not capable of being appeased or pacified" and is condemned in Romans 1:31. Meekness is the opposite of the ambitious self-seeking attitude that characterises men of the world. Meekness is the opposite of sudden anger, malice or vengeance. Meekness produces peace.

Meekness is not "getting even" but at the same time shows respect for what is right. Jesus was within his right to request his accuser to bear witness of the evil he had done (John 18:23). Since he had done no evil, it was only right that he not be treated as if he had. Paul was within his right to be released from prison by his accusers since he had been jailed falsely (Acts 16:37). Both Jesus and Paul showed great meekness in the endurance of their sufferings. It takes more courage and strength to be meek than to fight for your rights although neither Jesus nor Paul ever "ran-over" anyone to obtain what was rightfully theirs.

Meekness is one of the greatest Christian virtues. It has been possessed by many great men of God. Moses (Numbers 12:3), David (Psalms), and Jesus (Matthew 11:28-30) are among the many who were meek.

The Bible says meekness can be learned. It is not just something you either have or do not have. True it comes easier for some than it does for others, but it still does not lessen our responsibility to learn it. Since we are commanded to be meek, it stands to reason we can attain that which God desires we have. There are many other things we can learn such as: being "*slow to anger*" (James 1:19), "*to be content*" (Philippians 4:22), "*love one another*" (John 13:35), and to "*bear much fruit*" (John 15:8). We learn to do or be whatever God commands.

Jesus said the meek "*shall inherit the earth.*" To inherit the earth was a common figure used in Bible times to denote anything of a great blessing. It is used here to denote that the meek will enjoy God's blessings in this life as well as the one to come.

G. M. ROBINSON.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Nov. 5 Psalm 69:1-18 Romans 15:1-13
 Nov. 12 Isaiah 52 Romans 15:14-33
 Nov. 19 Genesis 45:1-15 Romans 16: 1-16
 Nov. 26 Deut. 29:10-29 Romans 16:17-27

THE EXAMPLE OF CHRIST

There is no greater example than personal example and Christ Jesus is our example in all things. If I measure myself against anyone else then I measure myself against that which is imperfect. Jesus is perfect. He is the Righteous One, the sinless one, the Son of the Living God. I must strive to follow Him. I must walk in His footsteps. I must love Him with all my heart and soul and mind. I must realise daily that He is my everything, He is my all. Without Him, all is darkness, dread and despair. With Him, all is light, joy and hope. I thank God for Jesus.

God is worthy of all honour, praise and glory. Paul wrote: "**Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus: that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Wherefore, receive you one another, as Christ also receives us to the glory of God**" (15:5-7). Putting these words into practice could go along way to resolving divisions within the brotherhood.

CHRIST AND THE GENTILES

The saving of the Gentiles was foretold in the Old Testament Scriptures. "The manner and extent of the blessing into which God would bring believing Gentiles - their incorporation along with believing Jews in the community of the people of God - might be a mystery concealed from earlier generations until it became a reality through Paul's ministry (Ephesians 3:2-6; Colossians 1:25-27); but the fact that Gentiles would be blessed by the gospel Paul sees as

something clearly predicted in Old Testament times (cf. Galatians 3:8)" (F. F. Bruce). As a Gentile, I thank God that Jesus died for all and that the gospel is not only for the Jew, but also for the Greek or the Gentile.

PERSONAL NARRATIVE

The apostle Paul was a remarkable man. His epistles reveal a man of deep faith, courage and endurance. I like the fact that he described himself as one who "**fully preached the gospel of Christ**" (15:19). The gospel I preach must be the same gospel that Paul preached. Anything else is a perversion of the gospel of Christ.

Paul liked to take the gospel to fresh fields. "**Yea, so I have strived to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man's foundation . . .**" (15:20). He was anxious to visit Spain, but not for a holiday. Things were happening in this peninsula and, as ever, he wanted to be where the action is. "The Senecas, Lucan, Quintillian, Martial and other prominent Latin writers of that age, as well as the emperors Trajan and Hadrian, were of Spanish birth" (New Bible Dictionary).

Paul speaks of the "service" (15:31) or the aid which was collected for the Jerusalem church. This collection was important to him. To him, it was a means of bringing home to the Gentile Christians their indebtedness to Jerusalem. His fear was that some in Judea would refuse it (15:31-32), thus his request for their prayers (15:30). "He wished to establish a coalition between the converted Jews and Gentiles, being sensible of its great importance to the spread of the gospel; and his procuring this contribution was one laudable device to accomplish this good end" (Adam Clarke).

GREETINGS TO VARIOUS FRIENDS

To a lot of people, Romans chapter 16 is just a list of names. However, I think it makes fascinating reading.

Phoebe is first mentioned. She is described as a "servant of the church which is at Cenchrea" (16:1), a town near Corinth which served as outport for the city. Many understand Phoebe to have been a deaconess. Next, we have *Priscilla* and *Aquila* named by Paul. He describes them as "my helpers in Christ Jesus, who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also the churches of the Gentiles" (16:3-4). It is interesting to note that *Priscilla* is named first. Perhaps hers was the more impressive personality. They were a great husband-and-wife team for the Lord. *Andronicus* and *Junia* (16:7) might also have been a married couple. They were Jews and had shared one of Paul's frequent imprisonments. *Tryphena* and *Tryphosa* (16:12) might have been sisters and quite possibly twins. *Rufus* (16:13) is not the first Rufus mentioned in the New Testament. In Mark 15:21 we read: "And they compelled one Simon a Cyrenian, who passed by, coming out of the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to bear His cross." Could they have been one and the same?

FINAL EXHORTATIONS AND GREETINGS FROM PAUL'S COMPANIONS

Paul was very concerned about "divisions" (Greek, *dichostasiai*) and "offences" (*skandala*). "Divisions" or "dissensions" are included in the works of the flesh "in Galatians 5:20. *Skandala* are simply obstacles in the way. We recall Paul's words: "Let us not therefore judge one another any more; but judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in his brothers way" (14:13). They had to avoid those who caused these divisions and offences who "serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple" (16:18). It would be interesting to know precisely what their form of teaching was.

Paul had friends with him at the time of writing the Roman letter. There was his close assistant and colleague - *Timotheus*. Was any one closer to Paul than this young man? "For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state . . . But you know the proof of him, that, as a son with the father, he has served with me in the gospel" (Philippians 2:20-22). *Jason* could be the same Jason that is mentioned in Acts 17:6-7 & 9. *Sosipater* is probably the Sopater of Acts 20:4. *Tertius* was, of course, Paul's amanuensis. He might have been a professional Amanuensis. Certainly, he was a fellow Christian. *Gaius* was one of Paul's first converts in Corinth (1 Cor. 1:14). Some commentators have also identified him with the Justus of Acts 18:7. *Erastus* was a common name and he might well not be the same Erastus of Acts 19:22 or 2 Tim. 4:20. "Chamberlain" is *oikonomos* and is a word equivalent to our "clerk of works" today.

DOXOLOGY

The doxology is found in 16:25-27. I have especially underlined the phrases "the revelation of the mystery" and the "obedience of faith." The two of them could command lengthy essays. I thank God that His mind and Will have now been revealed and that faithful obedience is the way to glory.

IAN S. DAVIDSON,
Motherwell.

TEST YOUR BIBLICAL KNOWLEDGE

1. Who stayed at home with Jacob while the ten sons travelled to Egypt for food?
2. Who had 1,400 chariots and 12,000 horsemen?
3. Isaiah received his commission on the death of which king?
4. Who looked back and was turned into a pillar of salt?

5. Who was the son of Amittai?
6. This number left Gideon's army through fear
7. Where did Paul make his famous speech in Athens?
8. What did the Athenian philosophers call Paul?
9. Who licked Lazarus' sores?
10. How many lepers did Jesus encounter on the road from Samaria to Galilee?

OBITUARY

In the early hours of 2nd May, 2000, Jim Davidson passed away in the local hospital after a short illness. He was in his 97th year and had been a faithful member of the Lord's Church for 64 years. He was originally added to the Church at Buckhaven, and in 1948, with about ten others, began to meet separately as an "Old Paths" church in that area. After some ten years, after virtually no progress, they amalgamated with the Kirkcaldy church, then meeting in Rose Street Chapel, Jim subsequently serving both as a deacon and as an elder.

Latterly, with failing memory and no living relatives locally, Jim went into residential care, where he gained the respect of staff and residents. His last weeks of life were tiresome but without signs of pain, and the Lord graciously answered his prayer to be called home. His funeral service was conducted by the writer at Kirkcaldy Crematorium and his ashes were interred in Kenway Cemetery beside the mortal remains of his loving wife Nell and his two children.

We look forward to a glad reunion with him, on that glorious day, and thank God for the fellowship and companionship of this faithful servant.

ROBERT HUGHES.

NEWS FROM THE CHURCHES

Slamannan District: The quarterly Mutual Benefit Meeting took place in Motherwell Meetinghouse on Saturday, 10th September, 2000 when a goodly company discussed the question "Section 28: retain or abolish?" (Homosexuality). The speakers were Drew McGinn and Ian Davidson; and the Chairman was John Kneller, Tranent. On this occasion, in addition to question-time after the speakers, the audience divided into four groups and each member had the opportunity to make a contribution and offer an opinion. This was generally thought to have been very successful.

Our next such meeting, God willing, will be on 2nd December, at 4.00 p.m. at Tranent Meetingplace when the subject will be "What is the meaning of 1 Tim. 2:15" '... she shall be saved in child-bearing.' Proposed speakers are Niall Scobbie, Dennyloanhead and Mark Plain, Tranent; and the Chairman will be Bill Cook, Dunfermline. Again we thank the good sisters of Motherwell for the splendid refreshments.

HARRY MCGINN (Sec.)

APPEAL FROM BELFAST

I am writing on behalf of the newly established Newtownards Church of Christ.

We have been meeting since April 1999 at Newtownards Orange Hall but have had to vacate the premises from July because of building work and the political unrest. We then moved to Brother Sam Stirling's home and within a very short period of time have outgrown the room available. From the off-set it has always been our goal to purchase a building of our own. Unfortunately we could not find anything that was suitable or affordable.

After months of searching for a building to no avail, we eventually acquired a building site on the Newtownards peninsula. We currently have a bank balance of £5,000 but unfortunately need another £60,000 to erect a suitable church building.

We are currently making an appeal to other Churches of Christ to help us in any way financially that they possibly can. We would be most grateful for you help no matter how little and look forward to hearing from you as soon as possible.

In Christian Love,
SAM STIRLING, 5 Abbeydale Avenue,
Co. Down, Northern Ireland.
Tel: (02891) 820662

COMING EVENTS

CHURCH AT PETERHEAD

Gospel Mission

Dates/Times: Wednesday, 15th to
Sunday 19th November

Wednesday to Saturday, 7.00 pm

Sunday, 10.00 am, 11.00 am, & 6.00 pm

Speaker: Frank Worgan D.V.

Social Weekend

Dates: 7th & 8th October (inclusive)

Times: Saturday 7th 3.00 pm

Sunday, 8th - 10.00 am, 11.00 am
and 6.00 p.m.

Speakers: John Morgan (Hindley)

Mitch Vick (Stirling)

A warm welcome awaits all

ANNIVERSARY MEETING

Kentish Town, London

To be held October 7th at 3.00 pm

Tea at 4.45 pm, and

Evening Meeting at 6.30 pm

Speaker: John Kneller (Tranent)

ANNUAL SOCIAL

Newtongrange:

Saturday, 14th October at 4.00 pm

Speaker: Bro. Alan Moyes (Kirkcaldy)

A warm welcome to all

GLENROTHES

Men's Day

3rd February, 2001

All Welcome

1. Benjamin (Genesis 42:4).
2. Solomon (2 Chronicles 1:14).
3. Uzziah (Isaiah 6:1).
4. Lot's wife (Genesis 19:26).
5. Jonah (Jonah 1:1).
6. 22,000 (Judges 7:3).
7. Mar's Hill (Acts 17:22)
8. A babbler (Acts 17:18).
9. Dogs (Luke 16:21).
10. 10 (Luke 17:11-12).

ANSWERS

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